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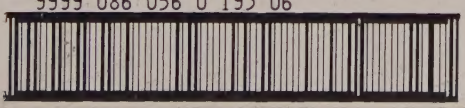

A WILTSHIRE VILLAGE

A WILTSHIRE VILLAGE

BY

ALFRED WILLIAMS

AUTHOR OF "VILLAGES OF THE WHITE HORSE,"
"LIFE IN A RAILWAY FACTORY"

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TO

EDWARD GARNETT, Esq.

"Amicus certus in re incerta cernitur."

ENNIUS.

PREFACE

I HAVE endeavoured, in the following chapters, to sketch out an old-fashioned agricultural village, and to give an unvarnished account of some portion of the life there. In so doing it was not my intention to be merely picturesque, much less to be romantic, to forge scenery, and invent character, to weave a web of fantastic design with which to deceive others, and myself as well, to be spurious and unreal; I do not fear to confess that I am not a novelist. My intention was, before everything else, to be faithful, to write what I have seen, and to tell that which I know. Accordingly, the characters that figure in these pages are not imaginary ones, but are, or were, real persons, blunt and plain enough, it may be, and unliterary also; but since there are so many professedly anxious to become acquainted with life at first hand, and especially with rustic life, it is to be hoped they will not be ashamed of the little that is here presented, however rude and humble it be.

My own view of rustic life and condition will be obvious to any who read the chapters; I cannot conceal my love of the country-side, and a boundless admiration for, and sympathy with, the humble folk who till the soil, harvest the crops, and tend the cattle; who are free from the shackles of town life, and content to dwell in peace away from the din and turmoil, the strife and battle, of the streets and factories. It has been my lot to labour in the fields and in the factory, too, to be both rural and urban, to have a knowledge of two spheres, and two sets of conditions. I have driven the plough, milked the cows, made hay, and harvested the corn with the farmer and his men, and I have toiled and groaned long years at the furnace and steam-hammer, in the midst of ten thousand workmen; but though in it, I was never of it, and, try as I will, I cannot find many good words to say for the manufacturing life. Higher wages there may be, and slightly shorter hours, and a few other "privileges"—a bigger house to live in, perhaps, with more games and amusements, but they can never compensate one for the unnatural confinement in the smoke, and stench, and gloom, week after week, and year after year; for the fever and fret, and heart-gripings, wasting health, the sense of despair and utter helplessness that grows upon the individual there; and, above all, the loss to character,

of sound healthy principles, hardihood, the power to battle with life and circumstance, and that jewel, so easily lost and hardly recovered—simplicity of taste, thought, method, and objective. After five years of town or factory life the ordinary man is incapable of rustic conditions and occupations; he feels to be bound body and soul to the industrial area, he cannot leave it any more.

Rural life is the more wholesome, for the simple reason that it is the more natural. That it is attended with hardships is patent to everyone; but the hardships of the industrial life are far greater than those of the village, only, as a rule, they are not well known outside the factory walls, and the worker himself, pleased with the extra wages, is content to suffer them in silence; such matters as health of body and happiness of spirit are seldom taken into consideration; everything is sacrificed for a few more shillings in wages. If the dweller on the land knew to what extent he must eventually suffer, he would never be so anxious to get away into the towns; by the time he has made the experiment and finally learned for himself, it is too late for repentance.

What the worker, as well as anyone, needs to learn, is that high wages are not the chief thing to be desired in life, for they are not obtained without great sacrifice; either he must slave hard for it and

earn it with his very life-blood, or else put up with considerable inconveniences of another kind. The aim of the working classes should be not altogether for the highest wages, which must often be procured with terrific effort, but for more leisure, more rest, more time for study and thought, more time to *live;* a greater freedom, good health, a clear conception of themselves and things, and a truer sense of the real independence with it.

The country labourer is happier because he does not know the other side of things. Highly intellectual he may not be, but he often discovers more soul and feeling than his town confrère; and he is usually more of a human being than the other, and a better *man*, in the true sense of the term. A great parliamentarian said the other day he would rather die than go back to the monotony of village life for six months. I may be singular in my view, but that struck me as being a deplorable statement to make; village life, even at its worst, is certainly not as intolerable as that. As for monotony, let anyone come and toil in the dreary forge for a generation, and drag himself home night after night, and year after year, sick and weary, with aching limbs and heart, and not a gleam of hope in the future, simply a world without end of dull monotonous drudgery: that is far more painful than a quiet day on the farm,

and a long night's rest at the end of it. I have lived it, and wrought it, and felt it, and know what I say to be true. It would be well for those who are disgusted with village life to bear in mind that remark of Cæsar's made at the house of a provincial friend, as he poured out the rank salad oil none of the others would touch: "He who finds fault with rusticity is himself a rustic."

A. W.

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A WILTSHIRE VILLAGE

CHAPTER I

Callis Hill—The view from the Downs—The valley in prehistoric times—The descent by Charlbury—South Marston—Roman traces—Betsy Horton's cottage—The sturdy villagers—Town conditions.

THERE is nothing more exhilarating, on a clear, bright day in spring or summer, than to climb up to the high downs that skirt the southern border of the Vale of White Horse. The best way to attain them from this point is by the old Roman road known by the name of Ermin Street. This leads you, straight as a line almost, through rich pasture-land all the way, to the foot of Callis Hill, where the uplands begin. Here the road is very steep—the lower part almost as much so as the roof of a house, the upper more easy and gradual. The road was cleft through the hill and must have cost prodigious labour. It can still be seen, towards the bottom, where the earth and chalk were brought down and placed aside; you can almost seem to hear the sound of the pickaxes on the yielding strata. The high banks, crowned with tall hedgerows, and overtopped with beeches, elms, and firs, shut out the morning sun,

and the slopes are clad with a luxuriant growth of blackberry and both kinds of bryony, cool under the midday heat. A little spring of pure water trickles out of the bank at the base. Halfway up, a narrow byway crosses, leading along the hill to the neighbouring village. The upper slopes in spring are thick with blue and white violets, which are succeeded by masses of golden cat's-ear, field scabious, and large knapweed. The hedges are of hawthorn, elder, and wild bullace boughs. From the top of Callis Hill you proceed for half a mile in full sight of the upper downs, then dip in a natural hollow, and up again, till you come to several cottages and an inn called the Shepherd's Rest. A large chestnut-tree stands before the door, affording a welcome refuge after the terrific heat of the flint roads. Here labourers and others employed about the plain assemble to indulge in games and hospitalities, and travellers halt in the shade of the tree to partake of such refreshment as the house affords. This spot is a cross-roads. The Roman way continues to the south-east; to the right lies Liddington Castle, above the ridgeway white and dusty with traffic; to the left is Hinton Hill, or Charlbury.

From whichever of these you determine to climb you will obtain a magnificent and inspiriting view. That from Liddington is the longer and more extensive; that from Charlbury, nearer to the Vale, is the more picturesque and distinct. To cast your eye to the distant horizon, verging from west to east, is like looking out to sea from some high cliff or promontory, and especially if you retire sufficiently from the brow

to blot out the valley; then you feel to be face to face with the infinite. On the clearest day possible you will not be able to penetrate the thin veil of haze, so baffling and bewildering to the spirit, yet so beautifully romantic and mystical, blending earth and heaven, softening and toning all abruptness in perspective; imagination is kindled with the overpowering sense of distance. The clearest view of all may be had in one kind of rainy weather which obtains in the summer months, especially when thunder is prevalent; then all objects in the middle distance stand out with great sharpness and perspicuity. Yet for all that the far horizon will be as indefinable as ever; the thin haze will yet be extended along the skyline, and the terrestrial part will be of a deep tone—purplish brown or dark blue—confused, and very misleading as to distance. The only way to determine the exact boundary between earth and sky is to observe the sunset on a cloudless evening about midsummer. Then, when the sun is sinking, a large red sphere, into the deep purple, and you, straining your eyes all the while, believe it to be yet some distance above the horizon, suddenly the lower part of the disc becomes invisible, a sharp line is drawn across the face of the planet, and the true boundary is revealed. This point is the summit of the Cotswold Hills in Gloucestershire, about thirty-five miles distant as the crow flies.

The longest view obtains in the north and north-east. Here are no intervening hills to obstruct the vision, and the richly wooded and luxuriantly fertile fields stretch away in unbroken succession as far as

the sight can penetrate, till all is lost in the vague and unreal. Now and then, however, as by the aid of sunset in the other direction, you may be somewhat more nearly informed of the extent of country before you. This is in rainy weather, when the atmosphere is comparatively clear, and the heavens above you obscure and dull. Then, if the sun should peer through the clouds a little, miles and miles in front of you, on the farthest horizon, on what, in fact, you thought to be no more than mere sky, you will see a dullish yellow patch or belt, high up like the slope of a hill. This is the extremity of view in that direction, and is only prominent by reason of the general dulness of the other parts. When the sun is obscured again, the patch vanishes from sight; or if the sunshine is general, then it will still be invisible through the haze and atmosphere. These temporary patches, showing like little islands of light in a dark blue sea, or far-off cliffs dimly seen through the haze of the English Channel, represent a distance of between forty and fifty miles.

It is claimed that there are seven counties visible from these heights. These are—Wiltshire, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, and Buckinghamshire. As all these, except Hampshire, come within a radius of forty miles of the hill on the open side, the claim may very well be admitted; it is a noble and extensive panorama that is spread out before you. The little Key and the Cole, arising near about, collect and bear down their tributary waters to the far-off Thames, which flows tranquilly away by Oxford and Abingdon through a

continuation of the valley eastward to the North Sea. A railway-line, running east and west, traverses the valley from end to end, and is one of the great highways of travel and commerce. You may follow the white steam of the locomotive as it enters far below to the left of you for half an hour or more, until the cloud finally vanishes in the distance. Custom has inured us to the sight, and we no longer complain and find fault with the exigences of modern civilization ; the white steam of the engine is no real disfigurement to the natural beauty of the scene, and bears witness to that which you are apt often to forget in a solitude of place and thought—the existence of a race of human creatures. Six miles to the west—we are on Charlbury Hill now—swathed and wreathed with smoke belched out from the stacks and chimneys of the furnaces, lies the busy industrial town of Swindon. Beyond that the ground rises gradually, densely wooded, and continues away to the southern end of the Cotswolds. Southward to the back of you lie the downs, continuing for many miles, past Stonehenge and Salisbury towards the New Forest in a wonderful series of wavelike undulations. On the other side, to the right of you, Faringdon Folly rises boldly in the valley, and sentinels the surrounding country. The tower of Highworth Church, which invited and received a battering from the cannon of the Protector Cromwell, stands right over opposite you bold against the sky.

Time was, before Nature had completed her early formative work and finally carved for us the

beautiful features of our little island home as we know it, when the whole valley was occupied by a mighty stream, or arm of the sea, which extended from the Bristol Channel to the present mouth of the Thames, cutting off the south of the island. Then the hill was very grey, and barren, and destitute. The slope was steep, broken, and irregular, not round and smooth as it is now; and instead of the clear, sweet song of the larks, which abound all the summer through, you would have heard the flapping of wings and the dismal croaking and screams of great fierce-looking sea-fowl. The fresh green turf, mingled with harebell, trefoil, and clover, had not covered it like a mantle; nor did the quaint devil's-bit scabious and pretty spotted orchis bloom there. A small creek ran down between Charlbury and Liddington, in and out among the downs, flooding the Aldbourne hollow; it would not have been possible to cross from one to the other, except at very low tide, and not then without great danger, for large, shapeless animals and reptiles sprawled and floundered about everywhere. There were, as yet, no ridgeways or *castella;* Cæsar had not led his legions; the battles of Barbury and Wanborough Plain had not been fought; there was no one at all to dispute the sovereignty of the world. The winds blew, the torrents fell, the sea chafed and roared, the heavy waves beat along the high ground above Bishopstone to White Horse Hill, forming the shore at that time, and the sun shone just as brightly as it does now; but it was oh so waste and wild, and lonely, so inexpressibly deserted and solitary, yet, for

all that, strangely and weirdly beautiful. Far out in the middle—for the stream was quite forty miles wide—the heavy mist hung in winter, blotting out the waters beyond; or you might have seen the white crests of the waves show for a moment and be swallowed up again; or huge amphibious monsters floating far out, dreadful to view, such as Horace tells us he beheld who first put to sea in a ship. In fine, clear weather you might have caught a glimpse of the infant Cotswolds, a mere line between the blue of the sky and the blue waters beneath; but for the most part that would have been quite invisible. The valley itself was submerged beneath several hundred feet of water, and was the happy playground of innumerable fishes, sea-urchins, and other monsters. More than one battle, too, was fought in the waves and on the shores of the stream, between rival denizens of the flood, when Nature, "red in tooth and claw," was slowly progressing towards her final dominion. Little by little the flood subsided; the sea dwindled, and dwindled, and dwindled, until it became a mere stream of a mile or so wide, and still shrank, less and less, until all that is left now is the Thames threading its way down the lovely verdant fields of the valley. And when we say that the Thames rises in such and such a place, we merely indicate the site of the last of the fountains which fed, or the course by which flowed, the declining river that used to stretch away to the far right of us here. Many years were necessary to clothe the slopes and the valley with herbs, trees, and flowers; but by-and-by all was completed. The forests grew;

game and wild-fowl thronged in the marshes; the uplands, high and dry, provided rich, long grass for the deer and wild cattle; and soon after man came along and made it all his own.

Now, if you have gazed sufficiently over the wide expanse of field and valley, and noted all the landmarks away there to the far horizon, we will go down from the hill, and make our way across the valley midway to where yonder church-tower looms against the sky. There, due north from the hill, four miles distant, just visible among the rows and masses of timber, is the village, some features of which I have purposed to describe. We came up from the Shepherd's Rest by the Ridgeway, which continues along the top of the downs, past Wayland Smith's Cave to the back of White Horse Hill and the Blowing Stone. We will go down by another path, and join the hard road leading below to Hinton and Bishopstone, and the country beyond.

The descent to the road is steep. There is a track running down, used by the farmers for climbing to the uplands above; the greater part of this round about the hill is cornland. Halfway down the track, hewn out of the side of the hill, is an even space like a quarry. Every year a stack of corn is built here; the traction-engine draws the heavy machine up from below, threshes out the grain, and departs elsewhere. The white chalk of the excavation may be seen for many miles; it is easily visible from the smoky factory-yard of the busy town before mentioned. There are two roads branching into the valley beneath—one leads straight down, the other winds

round the side of the hill to the north-east. This latter descends between high banks, and is very steep. The slopes are covered with long grass interspersed with the purple flowers of the spotted orchis in summer on the one hand, while over opposite is a continued mass of delicate marsh goose-grass with its pretty panicles of white blossoms, much resembling the gypsophila of the garden, only somewhat more minute and refined. On the right-hand side, as you go down, is a great hollow, round almost like a basin, carved quite out of the hill. This was effected by a strong eddy of the stream which flowed down the valley in bygone times. You may still see where the current entered and swept round, and afterwards trailed out into the deep again, taking a downward course. This is proved by the long taper bank or ridge running down towards the bottom. It is very pleasant to view the sheep and cattle climbing up and grazing on the steep banks of the basin—they seem to delight in feeding in that position ; like human beings, they are fond of mounting to steep and almost inaccessible places.

A little way down from this hollow, at the foot of a bank, surrounded with bushes, a spring bursts forth from twelve fissures and flows down the fields. Presently it joins a greater spring which gushes from the hill above Bishopstone, and the two go singing together under the green boughs to join the river Cole, three miles away. The road continues to the north-east through Bourton, and finally converges on to the main track that brings you to the village on the opposite side from Ermin Street. The hills lie

south, blue and distinct in the distance behind you.

South Marston, or Maason, as it is commonly called, is a straggling village. There is, really, one main street, if such it can be named, very close and narrow, consisting of a single row of houses, plain in appearance, the doors of which open almost on to the road. At one end stands a bakery and post-office combined; at the other an inn, modern and conventional, known as the Carriers' Arms. A little way below this stands a cottage where dwells "Grandfather" Bridges, who plies his trade of market gardener and general carrier with great energy, although past the age of eighty-five. His better-half supplements the income with the sale of sweets and sundries, and is noted for the possession of a ready wit and a hard business faculty. A little brook crosses beneath the road just beyond, and tittle-tattles all through the shade of high elms and willows till it emerges wonderingly into the broad meadows, and is received into the Cole just opposite a large clump of hawthorn that stands by the side of the old weather-beaten hatches. Hard by is a cluster of white-flowering chestnuts, shading the highway. From these trees a large bough was cut every year, till recently, to grace the signboard of the neighbouring inn at the anniversary of the old village Benefit Club. The narrow road, bordered here and there with old-fashioned mud-built cottages, leads away by the north to the ancient town of Highworth, or Hyvuth, as a good many of the local inhabitants persist in calling it. Another track,

known as the Green Lane, or Gipsy Lane, branches off and conducts you through the fields and under a magnificent avenue of elms till you strike the main road opposite Kingsdown. A footpath brings you past Hunt's Copse Farm and Broadmoor into the road leading through dense lines of beech to the pretty village of Stanton Fitzwarren. At the other end of the street are roads which bring you, on the one hand, to the downs by way of Ermin Street, or straight on to the industrial town of Swindon; on the other, to Sevenhampton, or Sennington, by footpaths through the fields, or to the Berkshire villages of Bourton and Shrivenham by highway. A short way west, across the fields, is the more considerable village of Stratton St. Margaret, of early foundation. This also is reached by footpaths through the meadows. To the north lies Highworth; to the east Shrivenham; to the west St. Margaret; to the south an expanse of richly fertile and luxuriant country, mostly pasture-land, extending to the foot of the downs, where nestles the peaceful hamlet of Hinton Parva. These complete the boundary on each side of the village.

The name Marston is of Saxon origin, and is derived from Merestane or Merestone, which meant Markstone. The village is not mentioned in Domesday, which is to be noted, because inclusion in the Domesday survey usually signified a subjective condition. There were so many villans, or serfs, pasture so much, and woods of such an extent, of such and such a value—the whole held by the feudal lord of the manor, or other privileged person

appointed by the king. But the village or settlement that escaped Domesday we may conclude to have been more or less independent, and free from the domination of the feudal lord; and this agrees very well both with what we think of the past and the present too, for there is a remarkable spirit of independence prevalent among the native population of the village.

It is certain that Marston existed before the Domesday survey, by the very constitution of its name; and we know, furthermore, that it was a place in the time of the Roman occupation, because there are Roman remains not only all around, but in the very midst of the village, though unfortunately they have been ploughed over now, and razed quite out of view. These remains were situated in a field on Rowborough Farm, some distance from the main thoroughfare of the village, and about two miles to the east of Ermin Street. A local historian and antiquarian, who rendered some useful service to the neighbourhood, described them as a "circus," and such indeed they may have been if a circus could be rectangular or square, for that was the disposition of the ruins. Old "Jacky" Bridges, or Dart, the road-mender, knew the place well before the ground was broken up by the plough, and he has told me over and over again that there was a "fortification," and that it was square, of quite an acre within the mound, that it was level inside, and that the walls were four feet high or so, and that he had kept the cows in that field many times when he was a boy. And I remember, too, that when I was a boy I kept

cows in a part of the selfsame field; and when the fogger came to do the milking in the afternoon, driving the cows up into one corner, I used to drink milk from the pail, sucking it up through a wheat-straw plucked from the rick built of corn grown over those very ruins.

In respect of the ruins, furthermore, Jacky Bridges, whose old dad was born in the village years and years before, and who worked here all his life, declared that there was no doubt whatever among the old folk but that the place was a Roman encampment, and all the old people said that it was coexistent with the *castellum* on Liddington Hill and also connected with it; to use Dart's own expression, which he had heard his father say: "There was one lot o' sowjers yander at Liddinton, an' another in thase field, lookee; an' both an 'em belonged to one another." According to this it would seem likely that the entrenchments on Liddington Hill were a base, or central garrison, and these ruins were once an outpost, one of many which were scattered about the valley in olden times, but which have disappeared now.

Old Jacky's father used further to declare that relics were found in the vicinity of the camp—bits of pottery, perhaps, and parts of old arms; and there was a very earnest belief among the villagers that if excavations were made, there would be discovered large quantities of these things concealed. Whether this is true or not I shall not pretend to say; but it is an old saying, and a fairly accurate one, "Where there's smoke there's fire," and, I may add, that

where there is a strong and persistent rumour or tradition concerning a matter, it may be taken for granted that there is an element of veracity underlying the account somewhere.

The cottages are scattered along the roads and lanes at intervals, and the farms are dotted here and there in the rich green fields. Winding round the lanes, bordered with magnificent elms, which stand in lines along the hedgerows and down the orchards, suddenly you come to a farm which, but a moment before, had been invisible. There are trees to the right of you, trees to the left of you, and trees all around you. The chattering rooks build in the high boughs above; the farmyard cock crows lustily, perched upon the ivied wall; the ducks waddle to and fro; the geese crane out their necks and hiss at you, or cackle, and pluck off the tender grass; the dog lies on the sward beside the gate; the red-and-white cows graze near, or lie down, chewing the cud, while the tiny calf, but two days born, with the star on his forehead—like that very one Horace described in the poem—scampers grotesquely about the close, with tail straight up, snorting and puffing; and here comes the carter, with the young mares in the wain, off down to the meadows, the youngster walking beside them, hempen halter in hand, whistling cheerily.

This is not the only farm possessing these attractions; it is the same whichever way you turn. Just now I was thinking of the Priory; you will find it so, too, at Burton Grove, Hunt's Copse, Nightingale Farm, or the Manor. All these are picturesquely

situated, are rich in timber, in pasture and corn land —does not Farmer Westell derive fourteen sacks of prime fat wheat to the acre from his field?—in herds of fine plump cattle, and thrifty workpeople as well.

The farmhouses are chiefly old buildings, stone-made, large and rambling, not designed with any special view to ornament, but intended rather for use, yet entirely picturesque. Away in the fields to the south is the Elizabethan farmstead of Earl's Court, in a truly delightful situation; and near by is one known by the less pretentious name of Bodge, not as interesting and ancient, but in the richest of rich surroundings, and out of the beaten track of civilization. The land is low, and greatly under water in the winter, so that accounts for its richness in the summer months. There are several streams in the vicinity, which flow down from the hills, and a great number of fine willows, in lines and avenues. The hedgerows are very high and dense, composed of wonderful hawthorn, and full of unspeakable beauty in the early summer. I have never seen such a paradise of leaf and blossom, such a picture of pure loveliness. There is an abundance of game and wild-fowl in the meadows and about the brooks, and the place is haunted by spirits, as the villagers confidently believe.

I should not have spoken of this quarter at all, since it is not really a part of the village, had not Henry Love, the bachelor, of Rowborough field before mentioned, who jig-jogged up and down on his old grey pony, held it for some time in his dominion. Those who have lived there since,

ashamed, I suppose, of the prosy name of Bodge, have changed the title to that of Lower Earl's Court. This, no doubt, pleases them much better. It sounds more genteel and aristocratic, but I have no patience with the shilly-shallying pride of the present generation.

I have spoken of the wattle-and-daub cottages, which are similar to those the old Britons used to make. The primitive idea has not yet been entirely eliminated, though it is like very soon to be so; there is a great anti-national feeling abroad in the matter of house-building. Till recently there were many of these in the village, and though they were extremely rude and simple in structure, this I do emphatically say, they were not dirty or squalid, for that is a quality, not of the house, but of the occupier. Betsy Horton's cottage will serve as an example of this, though it was taken down after the old woman's death. The building was of one floor, and consisted of two large rooms and a small pantry, with a wood-house outside. The fireplace was very broad; it was formerly the mere hearth, and afterwards a tiny grate had been built up of bricks, and fitted with several iron bars. Betsy's old people used to hang the sides of bacon up the chimney in the smoke, or lodge them on the wooden racks affixed to the beams of the ceiling for that purpose. The roof was thatch, of many layers, very thick and warm. The walls were whitewashed, sweet and clean, without and within. The floor was of large and small flat stones, of many shapes; these were scrubbed every week, and then whitened over with freestone. There was not much

furniture inside—a rude dresser for the plates and dishes under the wall, several straight-backed chairs, and the regulation round table. In the winter it was warm and in the summer-time cool; there was nothing to retain the dust and filth; it was never stuffy, like so many modern buildings. A tiny spring of water ran down immediately behind the house. Beyond was the Great Field, as it is called; the banks and hedge were always full of primrose in the season. A little strip of garden extended from the house each way; three or four apple-trees clustered around, the hedge was neatly kept; and there, in the evening, stood quaint little Betsy, four feet high, wrinkled and weather-beaten, with old-fashioned net over the hair—such as was worn by the proud ladies of Ilium—the arms folded, wearing a pretty blue print apron, and nodding to the passers-by.

Of course, some will say, "Do you call this picturesque?" For my part, I think it is; but if it is not, it is at least characteristic, and I am not yet become the apostle of absolute modernness for its own sake. Do you think we are happier to-day, in our brick-and-tile houses, stuffed up with gaudy furniture and trappings, baked with the heat in summer and half-frozen with the cold and draught in winter, highly rated and rented, forced to work hard and live hard with a hand-to-mouth existence to pay for the luxury of fine rooms, wall-paper with dado, a smoky or sultry kitchen-range, glass doors, and artificial tiled floors and pavements? Are we better for all the increased comforts and advantages of the newer dwellings and manner of living—the fine up-

holstered suites and sideboard, American organ or piano, imitation pile carpets, lamps with brazen fittings hanging from the ceiling and in the hall, pictures and overmantels, which must find a place in the majority of houses to-day? Do you imagine for a moment that we really benefit by the greater facilities we have for indulging the natural propensity for exciting amusement and enjoyment—dancing and music, roller-skating, billiards, whist-driving, the theatre, the cinematograph, the tramway, and the football field? Are we better in body, warmer, healthier, stronger, more comfortable, happier, wiser, in any respect whatever, by reason of the fastidious and fantastical modes of dress which have crept in upon us; the ever-changing styles of headgear imposed upon a simple and foolish people by a crafty and gluttonous ring of manufacturers, fashion-mongers, and tradespeople; the high, choking collars and skittish tie; swagger-cut jackets with padded shoulders; brightly coloured waistcoat with fancy buttons; trousers with tight, close-fitting legs, made to turn up at the bottoms; button boots of brown calf or kid, daintily made, and pointed at the toes; silk handkerchief protruding from the top pocket; gold or silver ring on the finger; and a large cane or stick like a shepherd's crook in the hand? No wonder so many hundreds of workmen are pale, and white, and haggard-looking, creeping backwards and forwards to the shed like whipped curs, bound hand and foot, body and soul enslaved to the hard task, forced to work as many hours as they possibly can to pay for it all, and in debt at the end, the very slaves and

subjects of their employers at all times—hopeless, helpless, soulless, and spiritless. That is one result of advantage, and convenience, and comfort, and pride, and respectability. I know those who sweat and slave for sixty, seventy, and eighty hours a week —far in excess of the average working hours—in the desperate attempt to keep things going; and the more they do and get, the greater and greater the necessity for obtaining still more and more, the ten times greater bondsmen they become. Others I know who toil under conditions little short of degrading, racked with pains and torments all the week, spending their precious life-blood foolishly and wantonly to enable them to sit with their wives in the stalls at the theatre at six shillings the two. Are they happy in it, and at it? Is this really the age of comfort, and enlightenment, and prosperity? Who is so foolish as to believe it? Do *you* believe it? If you do, you are past simplicity. To me it is waste, and folly, and madness. I should like to sweep it all away at a stroke, to wipe out this supersensitive regard for means and appearance, and to teach a more simple and sincere manner of life, dress, and amusement. Jemmy Boulton worked in the fields and was independent; sturdy William Eldridge did the same; so did Dudley Sansum, Johnny Bowles, and Jacky Bridges, and many more that I know. They lived in plain stone or plaster houses; had little furniture, but sufficient; brought up large families; had good appetites, ate, drank, and slept well; laughed, sang, danced a jig occasionally; were simple, open, hearty spontaneous, and generous. Their clothes were art-

less, inexpensive, strong, sensible, and serviceable. They wore the billy-cock hat, trousers of stout corduroy, waistcoat of the same, a woollen scarf or cravat about the neck; and strong holland smock over all, home-made and curiously worked, reaching below the knees, to be tucked up around the waist when there was anything to be performed requiring greater freedom of the body. Their boots were heavy and thick, of very best leather, made to measure, and well-fitting. The Sunday-best pair was the same, and was kept cleaned and well greased. They wore the billy-cock hat and smock to church—when they went—and nailed boots; they had no other propensity for finery; their whole accoutrement was, in fact and deed, made, not for ornament, but for use.

Their food was very plain, too—in keeping with their times, character, and appearance. They lived on bread, bacon—mostly killed from the home sty—pure lard from the same—not the adulterated fat such as you get now—milk and cheese from the farm, the very best obtainable, at sixpence a pound; sweet whey butter at the same price, or good wholesome salted stuff; suety or bacon pudding; vegetables from the garden; and eggs, the gift of the farmer's wife. They drank weak tea, whey in abundance, skim and new milk, and thin ale, or "swanky." This was served out at the farm, or they kept a cask at home; that was their one and only indulgence. As for amusements, such as we understand them, our cranky, mad-brained entertainments, they were either unknown or unheeded. In the evening, or at week-ends, they worked in their gardens, or walked

out and viewed the cattle and crops, and praised So-and-So's drilling, or cutting, or hedging and ditching; or visited each other's stables, and admired the horses and harness and cracked with each other's whips; or went to see the sheep and lambs, the milking cows and heifers, or the little foal galloping in the paddock. Or perhaps they went to the village inn for an hour or so to learn the latest news, and cheer the soul with a cup or two of "fourpenny"; then home to bed, and up at four or half-past in the morning, strong and hardy, cheerful, vigorous, and optimistic. Their shoulders were broad, their bellies round, their legs short and stout, their faces round too, robust and red, and jovial-looking; not pinched and thin, haggard and ghastly, like the townsfolk. And, mark you, they were independent with it—village folk never were so generally abject and slavishly obedient to every precept and nod of the "maaster" as is usually represented; it is an insult to the rustic population ever to suggest it.

Their wives, even where there was a large family, went out to work in the fields, too, along the summer and autumn, winter and spring as well, when it was dry and fit; or they assisted with the milking and in the dairy. There was not the endless sweeping and dusting, sighing and hand-wringing, as there is now; not so many ailments, real and imaginary, with which our wives and mothers are beset. Necessity and activity, the world and life out of doors, prevented or cured the greater part of those; and the children were not pampered and petted, bespoiled and befooled, as they are now—bloodless, toothless, and

sightless almost. The mother took the infant out with her into the field, wrapped it in her shawl, and clapped it down under the hedge while she went on with her work, giving it a rattle or other toy, or flowers to play with; Johnny led the horses for his father, and Jane and Nell kept the cows or sheep, or picked up stones or couch, or pulled charlock, or hoed with their mother. Grizzling children received a smart slap or two, and were quickly cured of the habit; every member of the family was hardy and industrious. Did not Granny Bowles, and Patty Titcombe, and Betsy Horton spend their whole lives, till they were nearly eighty, at work in the fields? and was any woman more robust and healthy, physically fit and vigorous than they? Or can you imagine any more strongly principled and virtuous?

I admire these grand old characters and honour them—they are not by any means extinct yet out away from the towns; I pity the poorness, and wretchedness, and helplessness of the urban and factory population, and marvel at their stony blindness to their real needs. The naked state is the freest state; as soon as ever you become involved with attachments and encumbrances, by letter or spirit, you have lost some part of the early independence. Every new necessity laid upon you is another weight added to the chain that binds you round; stark stern simplicity alone has the quality of true freedom. The old people with a small house, hardly any rent or none at all, little furniture, healthy bodies and willing minds, robust children, ready to rough it at all times, and no knowledge or need of

superfluous equipment or amusement, were far more independent than we are. The difference is, we are happy in bondage, and they were happy out of it. I would far rather live in Betsy Horton's or Jacky Bridges' bare old plaster cottage, eat simple food, dress poorly, and be free with it, than to wear away body and soul in the senseless effort to keep a fine house, to strive to be that I never can be, to ape my taskmasters and superiors, or to excel them in style and dress with my small means—in a word, to live a life of extreme discomfort, of foolish self-sacrifice, and endless misery.

CHAPTER II

Origin of the River Cole—Acorn Bridge—The hatches—The lost coin—The pool and willow-tree—Waterfowl—Skating and sliding—The coverts—Cock-fighting.

THE village is bounded on two sides—the south and the east—by the River Cole. This small stream rises in the hills near Chiseldon. Its waters, in the beginning, formed the reservoir at Coate, a large lake which was utilized to supply the old canal that stretches through the village, but which is now in a state of disuse. The villagers believe that the little river "runs under the reservoy," and keeps its waters unmixed with those of the lake. The belief is in part true, since it enters in on one side as a feeder, and runs out deep down through a sluice at the other as an escape for the overplus. After that it winds down through the meadows, under long lines of willows and elms, towards Wanborough Nythe—the Nidum of Roman times—and across Ermin Street, till it touches the village. Here the Roman convoys used to halt to water their horses on their way up to the downs. The Emperor Severus himself may have crossed here many times.

At every three-quarters of a mile or so there is a hatch, or hatches. The gates of these are lowered in

the winter and spring to flood the water-meadows. A very rich supply of pasture is the consequence; the grass is often as high as your waist. Sometimes the hatches are kept closed in the summer-time too, especially in the upper reaches of the brook. This is to bay the water up for the cattle. When the bay is full the water spouts over in jets, or flows in small streams, and accumulates again at the next hatch. Behind the hatch is a pool, often four or six feet deep, and generally teeming with fish of various kinds, especially lower down, where the stream is wider. Here you might have been sure of taking roach, dace, and pike, and sometimes trout, less frequently perch. These come first of all from the reservoir, and are carried down the stream with the floods. When the water subsides, a great many remain in the still pools under the trees and bushes and propagate there, if they can escape the many creatures that come to prey upon them.

Presently the river, swollen with the addition of several other tributaries, reaches the canal, and passes beneath the aqueduct. Here also the highway crosses, and a stone set upon the greensward is graven with the words: "Here ends Marston Road." Crossing the stream, you are in the royal county of Berkshire. Just beyond the highway is an osier-bed, and then the railway, situated on a high embankment. So you have the three means of travel exactly side by side, representing the ancient and modern—the canal, used in ancient Persia, Egypt, and Babylonia; the highway, perfected by the old Romans; and the railroad, which we may proudly call

a British institution. Just through the railway-arch are some large hatches, and on either side of these, deep pools of water, called "back-cuttings," from which clay and stone were obtained to construct the railway-bank. The spot where the highway crosses the river is named Acorn Bridge; the locality is called simply Acorn, and sometimes Hackerne.

The land here lies low and damp, and is remarkably fertile. Besides the Cole, there are several small brooks and streams, which have their origin in the hills away to the south, and are finally received into the river hereabout. The pools are very deep, and teem with fish—roach, tench, perch, and pike. The roach are of a very dark colour, almost black on the back, and the pike attain to a great size. A few years ago one was taken from the water over thirty pounds in weight. Its mouth and jaws contained several large steel hooks with which it had been entangled at different times, but it had snapped them all. In the winter, in the shallower water, you may sometimes take pike through the ice. They are then numbed and sluggish by reason of the extreme cold, and this renders them incapable of studying means necessary for their safety. I once saw some men take a large fish in this manner. The pike—a fine specimen—was laid up in about two feet of water. The men were skating, and discovered it through the clear ice. They cut a large long hole through the ice big enough to receive a four-grained fork, which they obtained from a shed near at hand. The pike remained quite still, and insensible to the operations. When everything was complete, the fork was thrust

through and pinned the pike down to the bed of the pool, and so it was taken. At the same time, it was a brutal and callous method of securing it, and could not afford any but the most barbarous pleasure to the hunters of it, though perhaps it is legitimate enough. There can be no doubt but that the being clutched in the gills with the barbed hook of the angler, and teased and tormented, and afterwards hauled on dry land to gasp the last bit of life out, is anything but a pleasant experience for the poor fish. Perhaps it is as well not to be supersensitive, but a little thought and reflection will be enough to convince any person that we are a race of murderers, and excellently hypocritical with it.

The river was narrowed in slightly to form the hatches; they are about sixteen feet across. There is a flood-gate each side, before the hatch, to turn the water off into the adjoining meadows. A large main trench, about six feet wide and four feet deep, receives this at first; numerous other small channels branch off and distribute the water here and there. Finally, there are tiny furrows, about half as big as those a plough would make. These are made by a man with a breast-plough. This is an implement with a small share attached to it, and a strong crosspiece at the other end. This end is applied to the breast, and so the operator forces it along and cleaves the trench. By this means the water from the stream is conducted entirely through the field; though when the floods are heavy, the waters do not trouble to flow in the channels, they inundate the whole banks and fields to the extent of several feet; the whole course

of the river is flooded half a mile wide; it is like an inland sea. Enormous crops of grass follow these inundations—the yield is often three tons to the acre. The custom of flooding the meadows is extremely ancient. Everyone must have heard about the irrigation of the Nile in Egypt, and it was usual in Italy, too, as the poet informs us:

> "Claudite iam rivos, pueri; sat prata biberunt."
>
> ("Close the hatches now, my boys; the meadows have had enough water.")

The walls and gates of the hatches are old and crumbling now; it is surprising what dilapidation exists throughout agricultural England at the present time. Everything is allowed to go to rack and ruin. Perhaps the day will soon come when even the irrigation of the meadows will cease to be, except what is performed by the streams naturally and gratis; for out of eight sets of hatches situated on the river hereabout, there is not one but is in a state of decay and ruin. There is no labour expended on the meadows either, or very little, in fact; everything is left for Nature to perform single-handed. She is as willing to work and slave for us as ever, but she needs to be assisted with tools and means. She will flood the meadows and grind the corn, and do I know not how many things beside, but we cannot expect her to keep the hatches and mills and machinery in repair; we must see to that ourselves. Remember, she asks for and requires no other remuneration.

How long these hatches have existed here I could

not say, but a small boy from the farm in search of "catties" among the loose stones in the water the other day found a George III. penny, bearing the inscription 1792. Perhaps this is about the date of the last new walls and gates; if so, they have worn very well, and might easily claim the indulgence of a pound or two spent upon them. Doubtless there was real sorrow for the loss of the coin, but the workman should have been more careful, for I cannot suppose money to have been more plentiful among the masonic fraternity then than it is now, or not in country places, at all events. At the same time, the loss might have been greater. The bricklayer might have been pressed off to fight against the French at Waterloo, for instance, and glorious as that may have been for a good many, I should have preferred building the walls of the hatch in the quiet and beautiful meadows with the waterfowl, to stumbling over bloody fields of maimed and wounded, dead and dying soldiers and fellow-countrymen.

There is a hole in the bed of the stream behind the hatch, six feet deep or more. The water, after passing through the gates, glides down to this over a floor of iron, and falls below with a melodious sound, quite untranslatable into the human language. There is no word, poetical or otherwise, capable of expressing the rich gurgling noise of water flowing over an uneven bed and dividing against the smooth, mossy stones; it is neither a prattling nor a murmuring, a sound not of laughter nor of tears, but midway between the two, wonderfully rich, and thrilling, and suggestive; it is the language of eternity. The

spirit is arrested with it, the heart beats quicker for it, the whole soul goes out to it and mingles with it, but its secret remains undiscovered; there is no human interpreter of it. To me it is an earnest of immortality, as the winds and the storm, the sweet, pure calm, the sunshine and the flowers. There is a voice in it unintelligible to the mortal ear, too inexpressibly deep and fine, and yet so exquisitely simple and comprehensible; it is the language of Nature and of God. When we have put away this cloudy body of material flesh and blood—for flesh obscures the spirit, and blunts the senses against the perception of ineffable things—and are absorbed again into the great natural and eternal Whole, whence we all come, and whither we all return, soiled and stained, or clean and pure with almost virgin loveliness, then we shall understand all things—the sobbing sea, the sighing winds, the roaring tempest, the pathetic brook, the twittering swallows, the nightingale's unutterable sorrow, the skylark's delirious joy, the thrush's loud exuberant note, and the blackbird's low, liquid, voluptuous music. We shall know the beautiful trees and flowers, the laws of creation, of birth, growth, and that which we mistakenly call death; we shall come then into universal knowledge, and shall recognize ourselves as co-eternal with Nature and with God.

A large willow-tree, strong and three-forked, grows over the deep pool just below the hatch. The branching takes place about two feet or so from the base of the tree; one arm juts out over the water, and then grows upward, forming an ideal seat. Here, in the

sultry days of summer, when the sun's rays pour down from the cloudless sky like a furnace, and the whole earth is parched and withered with it, you may sit in luxury, cool and undiscovered, for scarcely anyone ever comes to disturb the solitude of the place. The express trains, from time to time, thunder along the embankment; far off you may dimly hear the wheels of traffic proceeding up the highway, but it does not interfere with your peace and reverie, for you are most completely concealed from all this, and are inured to the sound of it. The meadow-sweet and willow-herb blossom around you, high clumps of hawthorn, overhanging the stream, protect you on that side, abundant crane's-bill and comfrey grow on the banks beyond, pretty cinquefoil blooms and hangs from the walls of the hatches in traces, large clusters of luxuriant forget-me-not thrive right under the walls themselves.

If you remain silent enough you will soon discover that you are not alone here. Presently a little dark brown mouse will run along the wall and sit cleaning itself; then a tiny wren hops deftly from twig to twig in the hawthorn, and among the roots in the bank denuded by the water's action, and looks at you as if to ask what your business may be there, if you please? By-and-by a wagtail comes to wade in the shallow drinking-place; then a blackbird flies and perches for a moment in the boughs above you, and hurries off again, uttering shrill notes of surprise and alarm; or a large brown water-rat appears from his hole under the bushes, and, after a little philosophic reflection, takes the water and paddles right up beneath you,

then, discovering the presence of a stranger, plunges with the sound of a small stone cast in, chunk! and dives down out of sight, soon to reappear at a safe distance away from you. Very often, too, the gay and beautiful kingfisher flies over your head through the tree, the moorhen swims cautiously in the shadows of the hawthorn beyond you, or the old heron alights very close to you, and immediately flies off again, for he is very susceptible to danger, and keeps well out of the reach of human kind. Below, every now and then, you may see a dace glance and shoot like a ray of light through the rich dark water, but there is perfect silence all around you except for the melody of the hatches; it is an ideal spot for repose and thought. Fancy lurks there under the boughs, and Contemplation dwells in the magical pool beneath.

Beside the flowers that grow immediately around the hatches, there are others which frequent the banks of the stream, and the edges of the large pools, and among the osier-bed. Of primroses there are but a few; these are almost total strangers in this spot. Violets, too, are rare, except the dog-violet, which thrives upon the slopes of the railway embankment, though there is the beautiful water-violet, so different from either of these other two, and very similar to the lady's-smock, which blooms on the edge of the pools, among the cat's-tails, flags, and water-parsnip. Here and there, in the bed of the stream, are plants of the yellow iris, with occasional blooms; it is a pity that these do not blossom very freely. Growing often in midstream, perhaps the moisture is in excess and tends more to leaf and root.

The butter-burr is common between the railway and the canal. The flowers of this are deliciously fragrant; they appear about Easter, and are very quaint. Afterwards the leaves grow to a large size, and are of an exquisite texture. Ragwort grows along the roadside, and fleabane too. This latter is darker and richer than the other. The large and brilliant marsh marigold is conspicuous in spring and summer; golden water-lilies expand and float on the clear face of the pools; here the purple flowers of the hemp-nettle show among the tall grasses; the graceful and exquisite pink blossoms of the flowering rush add wondrous beauty to the margin of the waters.

In the small stagnant pools the pretty little water-ranunculus blooms, with the purple skull-cap; the arrowhead too, with its sweet rosy-pink flowers, is scattered among the tall flags of the border. Farther down the stream, several miles away, the quaint snake's head, or fritillary, thrives in the meadows beside the river, and on a slope by the roadside, not far from it, I recently gathered a fine spike of the curious broom rape, which is rare in this locality.

There is an abundance of water-fowl inhabiting the pools and the stream. These are more in evidence in the autumn and winter, when the long grass and flags are cut, or have withered and died down. In the summer they are for the most part concealed; then they can traverse from one hatch to another in the shelter of the leaves and bushes without being discovered. When the grass has been cut in the meadows, and the edges of the pools stripped too,

there is no protection for the wild-fowl; they fall an easy prey to the murderous fire of the farmer or other marksman. The wild-ducks have permanent quarters here, and great numbers of moorhens. Wild-geese are frequent visitors, too, though they do not nest in the locality, or, at least, I do not find that any eggs have ever been taken here. In the winter the pools usually attract a number of swans; these come and stay for a month or two, or perhaps the whole season, and betake themselves off home again.

The nests of the moorhens and wild-ducks are very simply constructed, and, though sometimes sufficiently concealed, may often be found in ridiculously open positions, with no pretence at all to privacy. A favourite place for the moorhen to build is in the boughs of a tree overhanging the water so as to touch it. This is most convenient for the young ones, for then they are at no trouble to get in and out of the water. The little moorhens are almost black at first, like tiny chickens. These do not stray far from the nest. The parent-bird remains near them, generally clucking to them all the time; at the first sign of danger they swim to the nest, where the old mother hastens to give them all the protection in her power. If the nest is very readily accessible, they swim in among the weeds and rushes and hide themselves there most securely.

Several years ago an interesting combat took place on the fish-pond at Sevenhampton, between two moorhens and an old crow, which had come to carry off the little ones from the nest. This was situated on the trunk of a tree which had fallen into the

water, and was well out from the bank. As soon as the crow alighted at the nest it was violently assailed by the two parent-birds, which fought against it bravely for some time, and succeeded in beating it into the water. The crow struggled with all its might to escape, but the moorhens were too determined for it, and continued to molest it till it could resist no longer, and was finally drowned. The friend of mine who was an eye-witness of this, declared that the moorhens actually held the crow under water to give it the quietus, but perhaps he was mistaken as to this. At any rate, it was a plucky fight, and the moorhens deserved a complete immunity from all future danger for their determination and bravery.

In the winter, provided there is frost enough, there will be abundant skating and sliding on the pools, and often in the water-meadows as well, though the ice there will not be as stable. The draining away of the water into the river will cause it to subside; oftentimes it will leave it quite hollow and white, and incapable of bearing any person. Sometimes, too, where the water has drained away very gradually, the ice will be left intact on the bare turf of the sections or "lands" of the meadow, high in the middle and low in the furrows; to skate over it will be almost like gliding over the waves of the sea.

The country boys do not often possess skates, but content themselves with sliding instead. Their heavy nailed boots are very well adapted for this; they glide along over the smooth surface for a long distance. If one of the nails in their boots should

happen to be sharp and cleave a long white line in the ice, they call this a "streak of fat bacon." He who can effect the longest streak is counted above the average among the juveniles. The farm youngsters often meet with accidents in sliding and skating on the ice, and frequently get severe wettings at it. Sometimes they attempt the ice before it bears properly, or slide into a spot sheltered by trees or bushes, or, if it is in the water-meadows, they may be deceived with a current which has retarded the frost, and come to grief that way, but they do not care very much about it, and continue with the sport. Once, when I was in the habit of coming home from the farm by way of the ice on the canal several successive nights in the starlight, I suddenly found myself struggling in the middle of the water nearly to my shoulders. While I was in this predicament the testy old farmer at the house near by, being warned of the accident by his man-servant, who was in waiting for me, hearing that I had slid into the hole, thrust his head outside and cried: "An sard un devilish well right, too; a no business an ther." The ill-natured old man had had the holes broken on purpose to entrap the skaters.

The best skating and sliding takes place on the pools called the back-cuttings. The whole village, old and young, turns out to join in the pastime, when it may be indulged in, though the exceedingly mild winters of the past few years have not offered many facilities for this kind of sport. Sunday afternoon is the liveliest period; there are then big crowds upon the ice. The men and youths play "bandy," the

young women and children slide up and down over the shallower waters; there is no fun more hearty than rollicking on the ice. If there is a little snow on the ground, and a clear sky overhead, the joy will be heightened; everyone will be happy and lively and gay; the maidens' cheeks will be rosier than ever.

The water in the brook seldom freezes unless the cold is very intense; even then it remains open by the hatches. The wild-ducks and moorhens generally manage to keep an open space, however; by constantly swimming to and fro under the thick bushes they prevent the ice from forming there.

A little way off in the meadows in either direction are two large coverts of oak and fir. These swarm with all kinds of wild birds, especially thrushes and blackbirds, magpies and wood-pigeons. The busy squirrel leaps nimbly from tree to tree, the large gold-brown hares spring through the tall grasses, and the cock pheasant crows shrilly through the shadows. The tender "coo, coo," of the pigeons adds an air of exquisite peaceableness to the scene; the whole locality of the wood is a world of beauty and delight, charming the eye and soothing the soul as well. In the covert is a small shelter made by the woodmen in the autumn. This is formed by driving forked stakes into the earth between the trunks of the trees, and lodging slight poles or rails above them transversely. The sides are stuffed and interwoven with thick fir branches, and the roof is of the same material, thickly strewed. The shelter is large enough to contain two, and is very cosy and warm. The dense trees

above, and all around, keep out the wet, and scarcely any cold can penetrate. The ground is strewed with an abundance of leaves; one is tempted to rake himself up a bed of them and go to sleep there, as Ulysses did in the *Odyssey*. It is pleasant to steal into the shelter when the October winds are blowing wet and rainy, and read a little there. Out of sight and mind of the prosy everyday world one may indulge delightful fancies and roam through the whole universe at pleasure.

Years ago, Acorn Bridge was a noted rendezvous for cock-fighters, and for prize-fighters as well, especially before the railway-line was made. Challenges were issued in distant parts of the country, and the combatants used to come here to indulge in their inglorious sports. Happily civilization has gone far to stamp out this relic of brutal barbarism; I should grieve to think that such scenes could be enacted in our own day. Cock-fighting was indulged in by the villagers here regularly until forty years ago, and in all parts of the village beside, but this is no longer the practice; fear of the law, and that alone, has stifled the passion for it.

It is said there was a grave on the roadside hereabout—that of a man who had committed suicide in some sheds, and was buried on the spot. There is another local report to the effect that a man committed a murder several miles away in the other direction, and that he was hanged on the spot and buried straight away, and a stake driven into the earth and through his body, which, they say, was a common course with criminals formerly. How far

this is true I shall not attempt to define; in any case it must have happened a long time ago, and well beyond the memory of the present generation. The villagers, even in our own day, like to dwell on such matters, and to think they are true, though they are not. After all, it is but natural, and it affords them a certain kind of romantic pleasure and amusement. I would not give very much for those who could never endure a tale; for all their cast-iron temperament and general unbelief, they are no better than other people.

CHAPTER III

Patsy, the watercress man—Joy of the fields—Water-mills—West Mill—The mill-dam and "whirly hole"—The miller—Contrasts—Kingstone Mill.

After leaving the hatches, the river winds down in and out through most delightful meadows, past the covert, towards the little hamlet of Sennington. The banks nearly all the way are fringed with tall flags, willow-herb, meadow-sweet, and rich masses of fine forget-me-not. I have often clasped the latter up in whole armfuls. In the spring and early summer there is an abundance of large watercress growing in the stream, and about the trenches of the meadows as well. The boys and men from the farms know where to find this; almost any Sunday morning you may meet one or other of them bearing a bundle tied up in a red pocket-handkerchief.

Years ago there were professional watercress men, but these are not so much in evidence here lately, since old "Patsy" died. Patsy was a familiar figure about the village, and in the town too. He had been the local watercress man for many years, and had grown old in the occupation; he was well over seventy when he was forced to retire from it. Patsy was short and slight in stature, bent and stooping;

his clothes were ragged and rough, his coat-sleeves long, and his trousers short; his boots were very old, and full of holes; his feet were naked within them; his hair was long and grey; his weather-beaten old face was clean shaved and sharpish looking. He wore an old cloth cap, and carried a large flat-shaped open basket at his back, slung with cord over the shoulders. As a rule, he was only visible in the mornings and evenings; during the daytime he was lost in the far-off fields, and about the brooks and ditches. When he had obtained a sufficient quantity of cresses, he used to take them to the town and dispose of them to the small shopkeepers, and so eke out a precarious living. At night he slept in the fields, under a haystack, or in the cattle-stalls, during the greater part of the year; in the dead of winter, he was forced to take refuge in the workhouse. He was well known to all and sundry round about, though he was very reserved in manner, and seldom conversed with people. His general conduct was above suspicion; he was trusted by all, and was never known to interfere with any; he was a lonely and solitary creature. The last time I saw him was one morning in late October some fifteen years ago. As I was passing through the town on my way to work at an early hour I saw Patsy standing underneath the wall of a house on the pavement, in a most abject condition. The morning was cold and raw; there was frost in the air and some fog. He had his basket at his back, as usual, with a few cresses, and his old hands were thrust deep into his trousers pockets. His neck was open and bare; his feet and legs were very wet. I could

tell by the mud on his boots where he had been. He was shivering with the cold; it was enough to give a stronger man than he his death. I can still see the crowd of workmen staring contemptuously upon him as they passed along, smug and comfortable enough, to the warm workshops. I can even now feel the hot blood mount up, as it did then, in indignation and sympathy for the old man. I loved him then for his utter abjectness, and because he knew and had frequented all those little nooks and crannies in the meadows I took such delight in. I never saw Patsy after that morning. I think he went to the workhouse, and soon after died there. His was a hard life, in some respects, and a cruel ending, but he loved the brooks and the fields.

Besides the flowers and grasses, at every few paces or so there are large thick clumps of hawthorn growing upon the borders of the stream, sometimes spreading far over the water, or even quite concealing it. These clumps grow to a great size, generally round in shape, noble and conspicuous. Viewed in spring from a distance, when the meadows put on their virgin greenness, and the young leaves are just unfolding on the boughs, they are very striking. Later on, when the spring has advanced, and they are one mass of bloom from crown to base, they appear gloriously beautiful, and, together with the dazzling gold of the meadow-crowfoot, form an unsurpassable picture of natural loveliness. Years ago these clumps were much more numerous, and there was pink hawthorn as well, which added still greater beauty. The air all round was thick and

heavy with delightful perfume, overpowering to the senses.

Who has not experienced the wonderful delight of following a brook winding round and round through the fields, now this way, and now that, now turning in the shape of an **S**, now in a single loop, the entrance to which is so narrow as to be nearly inaccessible, forming almost an island; now starting forward, now turning back, as if undecided which way to go, halting here and pausing there, pondering, considering, reflecting, doubtful, vacillating, uncertain? How infinitely charming and pleasant it is to enter and explore all these little cells, angles, and peninsulas, and especially when you visit them for the first time! The hawthorn boughs almost meet before and bar your entrance. Within, the space opens out, the bushes continue, several willows stand around the loop, and stretch their long arms up to the heavens. The water, in winding round, has carved away the bank on the outside; the inner margin is thick with flags and bulrushes. The wild-fowl, startled by your strange presence, fly up from the water. Here an aged willow has fallen across the stream against one on the other side, and is saved in that position. The small ferns grow and thrive on the decayed trunk, and on the summit. The wild rose clambers high up; purple woody-nightshade festoons the hawthorn. The grass is richer and greener within, and you are quite unseen and undiscovered. Here, if anywhere, you feel the troubled ecstasy that is before nature; the heart leaps, and the soul is brimming over; you almost shout out

with it. Presently you hurry outside, and, impatient, run round and round the angles, past one and then another, peering first here, and then there, now through the dense bushes, now into the still deep waters, always breathless and passionate, deeply agitated and excited. At all seasons of the year the experience is the same—spring, summer, autumn, and winter, it makes no difference; there is always an unspeakable joy and delight in re-exploring every loop and corner, and following the zigzag course of the river far away down the fields.

About a mile past the covert the river turns a little to the right and enters a pretty dale, flowing along near to a wood of fine beeches, ash, and firs. Just beyond this wood, on the hill, is an avenue of magnificent elms, half a mile in length, with wonderful arching branches. To stand at one end and look down the interior is like peering down the long aisle of a vast cathedral, only the avenue is the more lovelily natural and beautiful. There is a road dips into the dell and crosses the river; it is very steep on each side. Here stood the old mill named Friar's, the first you meet with on the stream. Here is the house, too, known as Friar's Farm—Fyas, the country folk will call it—but the mill has been demolished this five years now. The all-conquering steam-engine has greatly superseded the water-mill, though it has not yet extinguished it, as we shall see, and there was not enough work locally to employ this, so in time it fell into disuse. The débris of the old walls and machinery may still be seen scattered about; it strikes you as being all pitifully desolate

now. The meadows alongside the brook are very rich; it is no wonder that old Peter Westell and his kin, who lived at the farm, made a big fortune in cheeses. That, too, was years ago; there is very little cheese made in the neighbourhood at this time.

The little valley continues for about a mile, winding round; the river follows the centre of it. This brings you to West Mill, which, though dilapidated, is still in use, and does much grinding, though chiefly grist work, with a little wheaten flour beside. The river here is broad and deep; there is abundant power at the mill-head. In ordinary conditions grinding may proceed all the year through. After this you continue in a northerly direction till you pass the ruins of Maggot Mill, then by the "flousing steps," which are an overflow of the river, and so on to the richly picturesque village of Coleshill, where there is yet another mill with a large "breast-" or "centreshot" wheel of great power, and an abundance of water, though there is no grinding done at this time. Then the river enters into the broad meadows again, and grows still wider and deeper, and wanders on and on, ever more thoughtful and contemplative, till finally it is received into the Thames, near Lechlade, and goes dreaming away to the sea.

I have said that steam-power has greatly superseded the old water-mill; it is pleasant to think it has not altogether extinguished it. There are quite a number in the neighbourhood, though not all are in use now. As I write this I learn that West Mill is soon to be renovated. The old building is to have a brand-new roof, and I know not what beside, which

is a real joy to me, for I hate to think that the river is despised, and the crafty, cunning steam-engine, iron-handed, and iron-hearted, cruel and despotic, is made lord and master of everything. Nearly every little village clustering along underneath the hills that skirt the valley to the south has, or had, its water-mill. First is Wroughton, then Bishopstone, then Ashbury, then Kingstone (two), and after that, Woolstone and Uffington farther down. There are no less than five on the little stream that drives these two latter. Perhaps some will be surprised at the obtaining sufficient power to drive a mill so close to the hillside as Bishopstone and Kingstone, for there is a vast difference between the volume of water at hand at these places, and that at West Mill and Coleshill. Here the river contains many hundreds of tons of eager water, always roaring away through the sluices, and capable of exerting tremendous power; while along the hillside there are only small springs which have been dammed up, and the pools are very shallow; there are not many thousand gallons of water contained in them. But it is astonishing what can be done with a small volume of water; you need not a great ocean to operate the simple machinery of a rustic mill.

I have spoken of the "breastshot" wheel—that is, when the water is level with the centre of the wheel; beside this there are "overshot" and "undershot." Overshot is when the water flows over the top of the wheel; undershot when it passes beneath it, or, to be more precise, through it. Where the water is scarce, overshot will be the more economical; where

it is abundant, undershot will serve very well. The centreshot wheel at Coleshill has a store of water against it eight feet deep and more, extending half a mile back. West Mill has an undershot wheel, and the full power of the water is never in requisition; if it were applied it would break the machinery to pieces. At Kingstone it is overshot: a very small spring and pool operate this. The wheel is of iron, and instead of plain smooth blades is fitted with pockets. The tiny spring yields a force equivalent to ten or twelve horse-power.

West Mill is situated in a sequestered yet delightful position, solitary enough in the winter, if anything ever could be solitary to rustic people, but beautifully green and cool and pleasant in summer and autumn. By West Mill is comprehended the farm as well. The large house and buildings lie on the slope of the hill, a short distance back from the highway, and the whole is surrounded with high trees and shrubs. On one side the road sweeps down and round, across the bridge, high over the stream, and shoots up a steepish hill again, completely arched over with fine elms. Near the top, on the sward, is an old moss-grown stone, bearing the characters, deeply engraved, "LXXV miles to London." It was just above this I gathered the broom rape. The old mill-house is below the farm, adjoining the stream. The exit, or mill-tail, is towards the bridge. The bulk of the water, released through the hatch on the opposite side, converges and flows round; that, with the mill-tail, forms a little island, which is overhung with fruit-trees—plums, bullace, and damson. There are a

number of these on the other side as well, which help to add beauty to the whole natural surroundings. The mill-dam, or head, is not a broad pool; the power is maintained by the length, and not by a closely assembled width of water. For nearly a mile back the stream is broad and deep, sometimes to the extent of twelve feet; as it nears the mill it is somewhat like the lock of a canal, with a normal depth of about six feet. The sluice on one side is always open a little to allow for the natural flow of the river. The water shoots through with great velocity, and is received into a broad basin, white with foam, which is called the "whirly hole." The water sweeps and eddies round several times, and afterwards hurries off; the large foam-flakes floating away like pure snow, or brilliant blooms of lilies or hawthorn. The pool abounds in fish—roach, dace, and pike.

The mill-dam proper is close under the grinding-house; there is just room to pass across by a small bridge. An old grape-vine adorns the west wall; it is laden with fruit in the season. Here is a door, and just within a small hatch which admits the water to the wheel. It is remarkably simple; you merely draw the hatch up gently, and secure it with an iron pin; a few inches merely will afford the necessary power. The wheel is within the building, immediately beneath you, and is very heavy, of iron throughout, just like the paddle of a steamship. The first contact with the water starts the wheel; in a moment or two it increases in speed; very soon it is revolving at a good rate; its momentum is considerable. To view the process you go round the building, and enter on

the other side. On the ground floor are large bins to receive the flour from the shoots, or sacks are hung, as behind a thresher. There is a trap-door above your head, through which the heavy sacks of corn are hoisted up. The pulleys are operated by power from the wheel; the water does all the labour. The grist, as you catch it in your hand falling from the shoot, is warm through contact with the stones. A wooden stairway conducts you aloft to where the machinery is. Here you are in the centre of a group of interesting tackle. There are two sets of stones, one for grist, the other for flour. The corn is fed on top, and enters to the stones evenly and regularly. Near by are the "silks" for refining the flour. The chief power is conducted to the stones from the water-wheel first by an iron shaft beneath; above, all the pulleys, spindles, cogs, and everything, are of apple-wood, strongly made, exactly in keeping with the locality and industry.

The revolutions of the water-wheel are increased to suit the miller's convenience; he can generate as high a speed as he thinks fit. The belts flap smartly from pulley to pulley; the wooden cogs run in and out, communicating their power almost without noise; the floors and machinery oscillate gently; the old building trembles sensibly; the fine impalpable dust of the flour settles everywhere; there is no other sound audible from the loft. The water, as it turns the wheel, flows out at the mill-tail with a musical note—the river sings at its task—and the foam is carried down and swims away through the bridge beneath the road, and out into the meadows.

The white ducks paddle about the shallows, and the old heron comes sometimes near to the bridge, and stands amid the stones, waiting for the small bait and roach which frequent there. The miller attends first to the feeding of the mill, then to the actual grinding; afterwards to the distribution of the flour and produce. He needs not to trouble about his power; his engine is trustworthy, its speed certain and reliable. The old river understands what is required, and performs its part very faithfully and well.

What an interesting character the miller is, and how important he is, and the position he occupies! He ranks almost before all the agricultural community. The plougher ploughs, and the reaper reaps, the thresher separates the beautiful grain from the prickly ear—all very necessary labour—and then the miller receives it and plays his part, and delivers us the pure white flour ready to knead up into bread for the use of thousands. Nearly all millers seem to possess similar characteristics. Perhaps the nature of the craft is responsible for this. Its genialness, natural simplicity, and quiet; the refinedness of it, the handling of and contact with Nature's most precious produce, the sense of being concerned in one of the oldest and grandest employments, have an effect on the individuality. The soft musicalness of the water, and the absence of all harshness of sound are a formative agent too; all this together helps to make the miller a genial character, and to give him a philosophic cast.

Our miller is a comparatively young man—thirty-eight or forty. He has worked here from a boy; his

old master, just deceased, was eighty-four, and had lived at the mill for sixty-two years. He is medium in height, rather thick-set and plump, very healthy in appearance, agricultural in type. His face is round and bronzed, tanned with the sun and wind, for he is much out of doors; his features are regular, he is neither striking nor intellectual looking, but reflects a genial disposition, a quiet and homely wisdom and intelligence. His voice is low—almost as soft as the waters that murmur beneath his wheel—his eyes are kind and sympathetic, frank and honest. He does not speak very much, he is sparing of words—to strangers, at any rate—but you will easily perceive the affection he has for his wheel and machinery.

He delights to show you over the mill, and make you acquainted with the several processes, and is not afraid to inconvenience himself. If he is otherwise engaged and you require him, he smiles softly and acquiesces pleasantly. Yes, he will show you round. Down go yoke and pails, or any other paraphernalia he has; he seems eager to oblige you, stranger though you be to him. Without another word he proceeds to the hatch: you follow. Here he turns on the water. That is eight horse-power. Could he increase it? Yes, he could pretty nearly double it if he wanted to; he could lift the hatch up to here, look, but that might break the mill. Then he enters the building, you behind, and while you wait before the bins, he sets the mill going, mounts upstairs and feeds it, then comes down to you again. As the grist falls through he catches a handful and

shows it to you for your opinion; you catch a handful, too, and turn it over and over with your fingers. Then the miller mounts up the stairway again, and you after him. He goes to the sacks. All this is for gristing, look. They do a lot of gristing, but not much flour now. None at all? Oh yes! We grind our own, but not for sale, you know. Well, someone may come and buy a peck now and then. This machine here is the refiner, and here is some of the "firsts." What do you think of it? He likes you to praise it, of course, which you do, and mean it, too; for it is deserving. It is not as fine as that produced by elaborate plant, to be sure, but it is good enough for me at all events, and might be so for others. It is a little brown in the hand, it is browner still when it is cooked, and very sweet. The loaves made from it are deeply rich and nutritious, not light, dry, and chaffy, like the starvation stuff you purchase at many of the shops, where everything is prepared for the eye, or the pretended refinement of the palate; the needs of the stomach and body come last—but that is the present fashion. Puddings and pastry made from it are as brown as the bread, but very wholesome. The puddings are very glutinous, and adhere well to the cloth. You need very little sweetening with it, and cannot eat much at all, it is so satisfying, but it is excellent for the stomach and body. It is no wonder there are so many white, pinched faces, sickly complexions, and thin bodies to be seen everywhere; they are starved with the modern scientific quackery they eat in the name of bread;

the strong staff of life has been exchanged for the sickly rush of civilized existence.

So the miller takes you from point to point, and shows you everything there is to be seen, full of a quiet enthusiasm. How carefully he handles everything! The gear is wooden. He sets it in motion so that you may see all, then, when you are satisfied, shuts it all off and makes everything secure. Now you go down the steps and out into the open. He lowers the hatch. The water still spouts through underneath; it does not shut quite tight, he says. The wheel still turns, then slackens and stops. The foam on the water in the mill-tail floats out and disappears. All is silent. The miller must go now, for it is late afternoon. It is time to serve the pigs and collect the eggs in the sheds, which is his work; sometimes he does this while the mill is running. Then he goes indoors to tea—his cottage adjoins the mill. After that, he may take a walk around the fields, or do a little fishing, or grind a little more corn for pastime. He need not do this, oh no! and he is not paid overtime, but he likes it; it is a pleasure. Mark this, you who toil and slave in towns and factories, whose daily life and labour are embittered by the iron laws and rules of ruthless system, and where the conditions are such that no additional effort is ever made voluntarily, and even the ordinary quota has often to be dragged from the individual by force, this man labours for love, pure love. What a change! What a contrast! What we have lost! What individuality, simplicity, content, and well-being! Do not talk of higher

wages in return, "rights" and "privileges"; it is the merest hypocrisy. All the wages in the world will not compensate a man for the loss of his own happiness and inner peace of mind. But look at the surroundings! You have seen the mill, the gentle stream, the dammed-up water, the flousing of the hatches, the fish leaping, the flowery banks, the grape-vine, the bullace-trees, the ducks and moorhens, the easy turning of the wheel, the natural—never forced—pace of the machinery, the sweet pure air, the trees and meadows, the sense of security, the harmony of everything. Have you seen the modern factory shop? Dark smoky walls all around you, the maddening noise of the boilers priming, the dreadful screeching of the steam-saw, the clouds of black smoke and fume from the forges, the air thickly charged with dust, ashes, grime, and filth, the thundering of the steam-hammers, the exasperating clatter of belts and clanking of numerous iron cog-wheels, the deadly and overpowering heat of the furnaces, the stifling atmosphere, the forced pace, the watching, suspicion, and jealousy; the cursing, lying, and tale-bearing; the stark, stern reality and sameness of everything, day after day and month after month. Who could love such a condition and be true to his nature and himself? Yet many do not loathe it, and some are quite satisfied in it, for they must bear it. But is the extra wages a sufficient recompense for it? A smoky and smutty gentility, a house in a drab side-street, the superficiality of the town, a weary body, a crushed and subdued spirit, a bleeding heart, or a dead soul! In

the one case is natural life; in the other a forced existence. The one loves his work and runs to it of his own accord; the other hates it with all his power, and is dragged, compelled to it. "Where ignorance is bliss, it is folly to be wise."

After all, West Mill is a small place, and not to be compared with the upper mill at Kingstone. Here grinding is done all the year through together, as long as the water holds out. It is singular that scarcity of water usually happens in the late autumn, in November and December, for there is no surface water at hand, but only that which flows from the spring, and it takes nearly two months for the heavy rains to soak through the chalk downs to replete them after the summer droughts. The water is collected in a pool of about half an acre in extent, and a foot and a half deep or so. This pool is situated in a small hollow. On each side are very tall, straight elms, soaring high up; the green downs rise in the near background: it is wondrously beautiful.

The water-wheel is "overshot"—sixteen feet in diameter. There are about eighty pockets on the wheel, each holding about five gallons. Overbalancing starts it; its momentum is soon accelerated. It generates eight to ten horse-power. There are three sets of stones within—one for wheat, one for barley, and one for maize and oats—and other small machinery beside. There is a "kibbler," a fan, a wheat-cleaner, various pulleys and gear, and a small circular saw. Here the finest flour is ground from blended wheats; there is no faking or bleaching. The trade in this alone amounts to nearly £800 a year,

beside all the gristing. The mill itself is very old. The woodwork and fixings are solid and massive, and have stood for centuries. It is said to date from the time of the Domesday Book, and to see the large heavy beams mouldering now to dust, and propped up with firm supports, you might well believe that these were a part of the old original building.

I have heard of a very powerful water-wheel that used to be on a heavy stream near Deane, in Gloucestershire, fifty years ago, at the time the steam-threshers were introduced. It was situated on a farm of a thousand acres, and performed all the mechanical work for this and the neighbourhood as well. It threshed the corn, winnowed it separately, cut the straw into chaff as it left the thresher, ground for flour, gristed, and sawed timber all at the same time. The work was performed by the ordinary farm-hands, who were highly skilled. There was scarcely any noise or confusion; everything proceeded smoothly and comfortably. It may be, when this wild access of roaring haste and mad-brained frenzy has cooled a little—if it ever does—that we may revert to water-power again somewhat, not only on account of its cheapness, but for its cleanliness, simplicity, and sanity.

In bygone times, as well as driving mills, water supplied the manufactories with mechanical power; forging hammers were operated by this means, and could strike about twelve blows a minute. It is interesting to learn that organs were played by water, too, in classical times; it is said there was one of these instruments in the Temple at Jerusalem. The

small petrol engine is creeping in favour at the farms nowadays. A great many farmers employ these for chaff-cutting, root-slicing, pulping, and other purposes. If this continues, the fresh sweet air and pure surroundings of the farm will soon be a thing of the past; the dismal, shot-like explosion of the engine, and the sickening and disgusting stench and fume of the petrol, will have prevailed everywhere.

CHAPTER IV

The avenue—The old shepherd—Sevenhampton—Its life—Sir Edmund Warneford's spirit—Queenlains—"Uncle Dicky"—"Barley Nuggin"—Rats and snails—Four Docks.

We came to West Mill by the stream; we will return by road through Sevenhampton. You will be charmed with the tiny hamlet; it is exceedingly pretty and old-fashioned. First of all you climb the hill, from which you may overlook the whole valley through which the river flows there. The features of the surrounding country are graven almost like the far-off downs; the lines sweep and curve, and melt into each other with exquisite felicity, but it is all most richly draped with verdure, and adorned with beautiful trees and copses. The road leads you to the village, going west. Now you come to a forked way. Here is the beginning of the avenue. A gate bars your entrance to it. A notice-board informs you there is "no thoroughfare." There is a lodge just inside, inhabited by one of the keepers. As to the "no thoroughfare," that depends. I have often paced the avenue in the early hours, before the guardians are astir. Freedom walks early; liberty is a child of the morning. There are many strongholds and fastnesses you may enter if you stir soon enough.

The time to live is in the first few hours after dawn. There is an unearthly beauty and splendour abroad then, a magic spell over everything; the poetry and romance vanish under the glaring light of day. The evening is another matter. That is delightful, but the dawn is ecstatic.

There is a broad avenue of elms up the highway, too. Here you climb another slope, then come to a cross-roads: straight on to Hangman's Elm and Highworth, to the right Coleshill, to the left Sennington. The wonderful elms continue. This morning is a sharp frost. Close in the field is a sheep-fold, barricaded all round with thick walls of warm straw, and divided into numerous sections and compartments like a little city, for it will soon be lambing-time; and this is the shepherd coming with his dog. The old man is of average height, robust and healthy in appearance, tanned with the sun and the wind, with a fine nose, regular features, and most kind expression. His top lip is clean-shaven, he wears a grey beard under the chin, his frosty old brow is topped with a billy-cock hat, well soiled; he agrees well with the hoar frost on the grass and the rime on the branches. He wears a strong brown holland smock, well patched-up, heavy nailed boots, and thick leathern gaiters. In his hand he carries a stout staff with an iron crook at one end. He is not an Arcadian, and consequently lacks the pipe. He is rather a shepherd of real life; his flock is of best English ewes, tegs, and wethers. His dog is a large, stocky animal, black and white, very old-fashioned-looking. He walks behind his master most respectfully, and observes a moderate

distance. When you address the old man, he does not thrust himself into your notice, but stands or sits some way off, and looks sagely at you, or turns his head towards the fold. Doubtless he is thinking of the flock, and where he shall lead them to-morrow—among the swedes there or along the clover patch.

The old shepherd is pleased to speak to you. "Yes, 'tis cowld; but a nice marnin, a know. Chent so cowld as 'twas." He has been up a long time, and is off home to breakfast now. He is getting ready for the lambs. Will the cold hurt *them?* "Bless ee, no, 's long as 'tis dry. Don matter 'ow cowld 'tis, 's long as chent wet; tha do get the rot so, then." The iron crook looks cruel and out of place. "Do you not hurt the poor sheep with it?" "No, bless ee, not if ee be keerful. Some people do say as 'ow it do, and 'ow it breaks their legs, but I never hurted one in mi life, as I knows on. A okkerd fella might do 't, a know." How sweet the baby lambs look when they are first born! They lie in a little nest made for them, and are nearly all ears and legs. Their pretty little noses and eyes are very quaint; when they are lying down they are like little figures in china or porcelain. The shepherd used to receive a bounty for lambs, but not now; that is included in his wages. On the downs there are sometimes as many as a thousand ewes, and these yield on an average eleven hundred lambs; but Shepherd Smith's flock is not nearly as big as that. A shepherd with a large flock of ewes is possessed of considerable skill, knowledge, and feeling too. See the life in his hands! He is father of a large family; he is physician,

nurse, and guardian combined; he is the Providence of the fold. He is sometimes the Nemesis as well, for he must perforce play the butcher from time to time, and supply the house with mutton; he can kill and dress a sheep with the best of them.

Formerly the shepherd lived at Hangman's Elm Cottage. This elm received its name, not as one might imagine, from an execution, but from a suicide there. Now he dwells in the village, at the foot of the hill. His old wife is dead; his sons and daughters are grown up; he is in the evening of life, near the sunset, but he is bright and cheerful and optimistic. The simple nature is not always focussing on the future. That is the worst of intellect: it sees too much, it is too far-sighted, it suffers endless tortures. *Λογίζου τὸν βίον καθ' ἡμέραν*, said Euripides. (Live thy life day by day.) Only the simple and natural can do this. The old shepherd is one of these. He lives in the present, and lives well, if severely; he does not trouble very much beyond that. Happy is the man so situated! Knowledge is not a universally blessed possession, after all.

Now you descend a steep hill and land in the very heart of the village, which is quaintness itself. All the cottages and farm-buildings are of stone. Stone fences line the road. These are thick with wall pennywort, which thrives well in the interstices. Formerly all the cottages were of a uniform rent—one shilling a week, and a large garden with it. A handsome modern church stands on the hillside, looking west. Behind this is a narrow avenue of tall, graceful elms, shading a path which leads to

Warneford Place, the squire's house. On this side dwell the old keeper, his wife and daughter; on that the aged gardener; and here is the blacksmith's shop. The building in front of you is an old barn, used as a Sunday-school for the children. Secular education is obtained at the town of Highworth, a mile and a half away. There is no inn at all in the place. There is a tiny post-office, at which the letter-carrier calls twice a day to bring news from the world beyond. Seven farms lie round about, the same number as in the time of Domesday, and which were responsible for the name of the place; the probability is that there has never been much change since the olden times.

Life glides along smoothly and evenly, almost insensibly, in the little shut-in village of Sevenhampton. To some it would doubtless appear a wearisome monotony, a life of dull, dead sameness, little and narrow, destitute of all variety, interest, or pleasure; but the inhabitants themselves do not think so. True that there is no daily ringing of the school-bell, no inn whereat the old fellows could meet and chat over the local incidents of the day's work, no festivals or holidays, no organized sports of any kind; that even the church bells often ring but once on a Sunday: even then they do not consider the life dull, and would be highly indignant if you should suggest to them that it is so. The "cyarter" is concerned with his teams, the fogger thinks worlds of his cattle, the old shepherd lives for his flocks on the hill, the boys make haste and get their work done and scamper off to cricket or football, the older

women go charing at the farm, the younger ones mind the children and look after the husband's welfare, the young girls clear away into service, perhaps far off, or else somewhere near at hand, and bring the "young man" home Sunday nights; bless you, they are full of business and incident, from one week's end to another. And who could tell you more about the old times than Shepherd Smith and old William Eldridge? Why, they could hold you rapt for hours with reminiscences of old agricultural life in the far-off fifties—of the hand-threshing, and the revolution and riots, and laugh as heartily as any man alive. Dull, indeed! It is you that are dull, and densely so, too, if you think they are not as full of sparkling rustic wit as any person you ever met with.

There are ghosts in the village, or were, until they were laid recently; that, at least, is a subject for talk among the timid and credulous inhabitants. Ghost tales do not die out, nor ever will. The younger generations do not converse much about them, certainly, but the older people do. Youth is crammed full of its own exuberant romanticism. There is no need to exploit other worlds and scenes for excitement; but as time draws on, and the early dreams fade, middle age must indulge the natural propensity: we are all more or less superstitious.

The long dark avenues, walks, and drives that lead down to the old mansion, the coverts and thickets, and creepy-looking fish-pond, are admirably adapted for ghosts; it would be surprising if there were not a local spirit or two lurking somewhere about the pools and shadows. Accordingly, we find there is one

spirit haunts a spot in the avenue supposed to contain a buried treasure. This is the familiar ghost, and may very well be scorned and contemned. For spirits who haunt the earth from passionate unrest, or agonizing remorse for something or other committed in this life, or even who were so deeply attached to this earth they could not be torn from the loves and pleasures of it, I have profound respect, and not a little indulgence: they are, or were, serious and intense beings; but as for the material ghost, that is merely grieved and distressed because it cannot still enjoy its sordid worldly treasure, nor be prevailed upon to leave the vicinity of it, it should languish in its hell of covetous desire for ever and ever.

The other ghost—and a fine, gentlemanly spirit it was, too—was possessed with a passionate love of hunting, which separation from the body could not extinguish. This was the shade of a worthy knight, one Sir Edmund Warneford, who all his life rode to hounds, and when his old body was too feeble and withered to hunt any more and succumbed at last to that other hunter with the scythe, reappeared from the dead, mounted on his favourite grey, and rode pell-mell up the drive and cleared the high gate every night at twelve, making the village ring with his loud cries of "Yo ho! tally ho!" and striking terror into the old folk. I do not know how many years they stood this midnight frenzy—I think it was for several generations—but they came at last to be very weary of it all, and finally set about means for obtaining a parley with the sporting spirit. So a company of clergy lay in wait for a good many nights under

the trees, seeking a favourable opportunity to take the ghost in a quieter mood on his return from the chase, and at last were successful; they met him coming home by a roundabout way. After pointing out the unfortunate plight the villagers were in, and soundly rating him for his wicked behaviour in disturbing the peaceful midnight, and a great deal of wheedling and coaxing, pleading and praying, beseeching and persuading, they induced him to consent to being laid. The parsons stood together, shivering and shaking with fright; though they pretended to be brave and bold enough. Old Sir Edmund retired from view altogether, and shrank into a hollow tree; his ghostly voice, thin and weak, sounded as far away as White Horse Hill. Yes, he had hunted long enough now; he was willing to lie down and rest finally. Did he wish to make any special request? Did he know of anything? What were the conditions upon which he would receive the quietus? As to the first question, the answer was "No." As to the second, it was "No" also. He was innocent of all guilt or crime; he was a clean ghost. The only condition he required was, first, the sacrifice of a couple of gamecocks taken with a pair of clay gloves, and the ministrations of twelve parsons unattended. So the clay gloves were forthcoming, and the two young gamecocks as well. These were brought at midnight, and laid down at the foot of the tree in the moonshine. Old Sir Edmund's spirit lurked in the hollow trunk. The twelve parsons stood in a ring near by and read from their Bibles backward, as hard as ever they were able, one against the other. In a

short while the ghost squeaked like a rabbit in the clutches of a weasel, and rent the two cocks violently; their feathers flew in all directions. Then, with a loud "Youp!" and "Yo ho!" and a long "Tally ho!" that was heard all round the neighbourhood, it vanished into the pool of water under the trees, there to remain till the pond shall run dry, then to reappear. The surface of the pool bubbled and foamed like a pot boiling, and afterwards became calm and motionless. That was the last ever seen or heard of old Sir Edmund Warneford's ghost.

Passing along the one and only street you cross over a tiny brook, and immediately climb the hill on the other side, leaving the village in the hollow behind you. There is a large rookery in the dale to the right as you ascend the slope. Great numbers of rooks frequent here and in the woods over beyond. These obtain the chief part of their food from the cornfields round about, and hold their quarters in the high elm-trees. The top of the hill commands an extensive view of the valley and downs to the south. Far away in the distance, to the extreme right, is Barbury Castle and clump, just visible against the blue-grey sky; in front of you are Liddington and Charlbury; farther along is Wayland Smith's Cave, obscured in the beechen covert to the east of Ashbury, and after that White Horse Hill, and, just beneath it, Dragon Hill, where good King George slew the fiery beast. South Marston, upon which we are again steadily converging, lies deep below in the valley, completely hidden from view by tall, dense trees. The steam of the railway engine, dazzling

white, is visible a moment right away to the left of you over Acorn meadows; then it dissolves and disappears altogether.

Climbing up the highway, along the hill, you come to several series of tall elms, which are visible all round for many miles, and especially from the tops of the downs facing you in the distance. At the farthest end of these a road leads through the fields to Queenlains Farm. Here, for a great number of years, lived one Richard Chillingworth, bachelor—"Uncle Dicky" he was always called—together with his sister Maria, an elderly maiden lady, conspicuous for her kindness to the farm-boys. When young Strawberry, of Round Robin, came to the farm one day, and had been asked into the kitchen to have a bite and a sup, she surprised the youngster by bringing in a monster roly-poly pudding, smoking hot, and saying: "Which end will you 'ave, the crutton end, or the carrot end?" The pudding was made of cruttons and carrots.

Uncle Dicky was an old man a quarter of a century ago. His farm was very extensive—some hundreds of acres—lying around in every direction. He might have said, with Alexander Selkirk in the poem: "I am monarch of all I survey," though he was only the tenant of it, not the actual possessor. He and his ancestors had occupied that holding for nearly a century, and had made a good pile out of the bounteous old earth. Those were the palmy days for agriculture, as it is frequently said; wheat fetched a good price, there was not so much imported from oversea, and, consequently, not the same amount of competi-

tion; and the Crimean War, though it cost much blood and treasure, conferred a not insignificant benefit on corn-growers in these islands, and Richard Chillingworth, with many others, became the richer for it.

Uncle Dicky was of slight stature, middle height, and gentlemanly appearance. His features were clean cut—fine nose, kindly eyes, very thin lips. His hair was short and grey; he wore a cloth suit, and a white felt bolero hat. He seldom walked about the fields of his farm, but rode a very quiet chestnut that went jiggetty-jog, jiggetty-jog everywhere. His lands extended right down to the village. Every day he visited there. At a certain hour of the morning and afternoon you would see his white hat bobbing up and down over the hedge-tops. When he came to a gate, he opened it without dismounting; his chestnut understood the operation, and cantered close up; the old man leant over, and opened it with the handle of his whip, and closed it up again securely; then jiggetty-jog away as before. If a small boy happened to be anywhere about the fields bird's-nesting, or getting nuts or blackberries, and the old man came up unexpectedly, and the youngster did not run away at first sight—for they were all mortally afraid of "Old Dicky"—but stayed and opened the gate for him, he might escape without a good scolding, but he never received a gratuity. Instead, the old man would very likely look at him pleasantly enough and say: "Wha's thy name?" and, on the youngster's telling him, would reply: "Come yer, an' let I hit tha one on the head wi' my crab."

Hereupon the youngster would take to his heels and scamper off in a great fright as fast as his legs could carry him.

Dicky was well on in years before reaping machines were introduced. He had much corn-land in those days, and grew abundant crops of wheat. Jacky Bridges, the road-mender, remembers fagging the first field of wheat for him, for up till then reaping was the method universally employed—that is, holding the straw with one hand, and cutting it with the old-fashioned sickle by means of the other. Uncle Dicky had heard of faggers, but had never employed any, though he wished to try the new method. So when old Jacky respectfully asked him if he "wanted any rippin' done," "H'm," replied he, "h'm, dwun know as ee do. Should like some faggers very well. Dwun want no rippers. Wher do you chaps come fram?" "Aw, down yander," Jacky answered, "and we can vag vor ee, if ee wants us to, a know, maaster. My mate yer, ee got 'is machinery along wi'n." "Come an out, and le's see what ee can do," the old man replied, and took them out to the wheat. Jacky and his mate, armed with fagging-hooks and sticks, soon slashed the wheat down in fine style, to the huge delight of the old man. "H'm, h'm, tha's capital. I can see you fellas bin at this game afore to-day. Go an with the piece and knock it down, an I'll settle w'ee when ya finished," and shuffled off, head down, back to the farm-house. He had never seen the Marston faggers at work before, and was well pleased with the process. The price for fagging wheat varied according to the weight of the crop and

its condition, up-standing or otherwise, from 11s. to 15s. an acre.

There was one person who lived down in the village that was a constant source of trouble and irritation to the old man. This was an old woman named Blunsdon, otherwise known as "Barley Nuggin," by reason of her activity at leasing up the barley and wheat in the harvest. The two were often in contact; there was generally a little disagreeableness resulting somehow or other. Not that the old fellow objected to leasing in the least; he liked to see the women and children gathering up the ears in the stubble well enough, and never interfered with them. Nor did he mind their going blackberrying, or gathering rotten wood under the trees in the meadows, as long as they did not interfere with the mounds, but he would have all the gates securely shut after they had gone through. And this is what Barley Nuggin never would do. Moreover, she used to take a hatchet into the old man's fields and go "chumpon," as she called it—that is, getting chumps or stoles of wood out of the hedges, and take them home to burn.

Barley Nuggin was a long, lank, wrinkled old dame, very thin and stooping. Her nose was long and sharp; her chin pointed, too; her lips pressed tightly together; her eyes sunk and watery; high forehead; shrunk, withered cheeks; very grey hair, confined in the old net. She wore a faded blue print sun-bonnet; her whole appearance was sharp, sour, and disagreeable. She generally wore a little woollen cross-over, a black threadbare skirt, and heavy nailed boots. She was the first woman to go

leasing in the autumn, and was not at all particular as to whether the field was cleared or not. If there were sheaves remaining, she would pluck handfuls of corn from them with no compunction whatever. As soon as she had made a hasty run over the piece, she decamped elsewhere, always afraid lest she should come second anywhere, and so miss the first gleanings. She was frequently talking about making "barley nuggins" with the leased corn: that is how she acquired the nickname. The old man Chillingworth knew of her propensity for theft, and sometimes lay in wait for her. He was sorely troubled about the "chumping" business, too, and, what was more, she never would close the gates, but left them all wide open for the cattle to wander through. At last, one day, he caught the old dame red-handed, with hatchet, wood, and all; she was just passing through a gateway. So he rode up to her, and told her to put it all down, but she answered with: "Thee go on with tha. Who dost thenk's afraid o' thee? I wunt do no sich theng." This was too much for Dicky. He lost his temper, and struck at her with his stick. Nuggins vapoured and spat at him like a wild cat. "Ya owld devil," she screamed, "I 'awp I shall meet tha in hell, I do." With that the old man turned his horse and cantered off. He had met his master, or his mistress, that time, at any rate.

Uncle Dicky always had a vast number of corn-ricks about the farm; he was never in a hurry to thresh out. Sometimes a stack stood a dozen years before being cleared of the grain—that is, what the rats and mice had not been able to devour in the

time. People said he was a miser and did not want the money, but that was not true. If he had been a miser he would have threshed the ricks and made sure of it, and hoarded the gold. I have heard of a wheatstack that stood for thirty-two years, though there could not possibly have been anything left but straw and "chammings." When Farmer Westell threshed a rick of beans last year, that had only stood two summers, the men killed no less than one hundred and forty-eight rats, and several hundred mice. This was a great day for the hens in the farmyard; they waited around the threshing tackle and caught the rodents as they ran off, and devoured them with great satisfaction; they are very fond of mice.

Rats were a recognized article of food among the ancient Romans and other Mediterranean peoples, and were reared and fattened for the table, as we learn from Varro, the Latin writer on agriculture. No doubt they were very popular, and highly esteemed in those days; it is a matter of sentiment that prevents our eating many things in this generation. One can scarcely imagine the refined taste of Horace and Mæcenas descending to that fare, though, however dainty it may have been. I expect they would have preferred the Ionian woodcock, the African guinea-fowl, rhombus, and Lucrine shellfish. Speaking of shellfish, too, reminds us of the old-world predilection for snails, which have not yet gone out of favour. The old Greeks were fond of these latter; does not Æsop tell us, in the fable, of the boy roasting snails in the coals of the fire, as they do to this day

in the village here? The artless Greek child, hearing that noise which accompanies the exuding of moisture from the hot shell, while the poor snail is roasting, exclaimed: "Foolish animal! While your house is burning, you are singing within." I once knew a man, a rough farm-hand, nicknamed "Happy," who ate snails raw, shells and all; but he did not attain to a great age; he died rather young, and in the workhouse, of consumption, though the eating of snails is considered to be a safeguard against that complaint.

Leaving Queenlains you come immediately to a highroad, leading to the town of Swindon, five miles away. This is bordered, for a mile or so, by a plantation of beech, and the place is called Stanton Firs. Presently a small by-road branches off and brings you through delightful avenues of beech to the quiet little hamlet of Stanton Fitzwarren, noted for its pretty, old church, its lake, and woods. A little distance farther along is the site called Cat's Brain, the home of old Joby Lane, and the working ground of Josh Hughes. Opposite this is Hunt's Copse Farm, with its splendid avenue of venerable elms on one side, and of ash on the other. The field opposite Stanton turn is called Four Docks. If you had walked down Green Lane, from Cat's Brain, some years since, you might have seen a large notice-board affixed to an oak-tree in the wood telling you to "Beware of the man-traps." These relics of a semi-barbarism have been well described by Richard Jefferies in his "Gamekeeper at Home"; nevertheless, if any among you should be desirous of seeing

one, he may do so the next time he chances to be at the city of Oxford. There, outside a house in Park End Street, is one affixed to the wall high up, opened ready to snap together; it is exactly like a modern iron rat-trap, with very sharp teeth and strong spring. It must have been an unpleasant experience for the sporting individual who chanced to get caught in one; I should think he avoided the woods by night for ever after that adventure.

There are some stone quarries in Four Docks field, and ten large chestnut-trees standing along the other side. Harry New, the old quarryman, was employed here all the year round, when I was a boy; and here my mother used to bring us to glean up the wheat in the harvest holidays. The spot is very lonely by night; it was not an uncommon thing then to be stopped by thieves, and forced to hand over your purse or other valuables. I remember we came to the field once immediately after dinner to lease up some wheat there. The sky was dull and leaden, there was no wind, and the air was humid and oppressive. Little white clouds — "messengers," Josh Hughes always called them—stood out in relief against the darker background, and floated across the sky—a certain sign of wet among rustic people. We stowed our small bundle of clothes and provisions beneath a fine large chestnut, fastened the linen bags for the ears about our waist, and went into the stubble. Very soon the large drops of rain came, steadily at first, then thicker and thicker. We kept on gleaning for a little while, then all took shelter under the chestnut, and in the deep ditch. The old

quarryman stowed his tools and wheelbarrow, and, taking his dinner-basket, prepared to leave the field. "No more dry to-day," he shouted, and pointed to the solid, leaden sky above. "No more dry to-day, I says," he repeated, then trudged off across the stubble into the roadway and disappeared. We stood under the chestnut and watched him go, my mother in dismay, we with feelings of pleasure and delight; we liked the storms to come and confine us in the shelter of the trees now and then. The rain swept in clouds across the valley from the south-west, almost blotting out the other part of the field; the hedges and trees were soon dripping with the moisture. We children climbed the high boughs, and ran all along the ditch among the tall docks and thistles, or played hide-and-seek. Presently we ate the afternoon meal, squatting around the trunk; then, as the rain showed no signs of abating, and the large drops from the leaves were making our clothes very wet, we packed up our small belongings and tramped off down the long road home to the village.

CHAPTER V

The workhouse—Its tragedy—Tramps—The infirmary—Inmates—Robert Brooks—The Crimean veteran—The old schoolmaster.

FOLLOWING the way down by Cat's Brain fields, a short distance brings you to the workhouse, which, though a mile from the village, is yet very closely related to it: it is the last home of the poorest and most unfortunate. Many have gone there to end their days, to die out of sight of all that is kind and charitable, doubting of life, doubting of love, of truth, fidelity, and friendship, doubting sometimes even of Providence itself—alone, forgotten, deserted for ever, forlorn and solitary. The workhouse is not one building; there are many sections and departments, a great many of them modern, newly-built, indicative of the times. Fifty years ago the place was considerably smaller, but there was not so much poverty about in those days, and what is more, a good many of the old folk were not so readily inclined to accept of its barren hospitality as are very many of this generation; there is a deplorable weakening of character creeping in all round upon us. Modern local industries and conditions, too, have vastly increased the need of a refuge; it is surprising how

many "cast-offs" there are here from the manufacturing centre. Once admitted, these soon became acclimatized. The atmosphere and environment of the place prevail over whatever moral courage they may otherwise have had; they accept the condition, and think no more of battling with life themselves. If they were not paupers before, they are doubly so now, physically and morally too.

The general aspect of the place from the entrance is very gloomy and forbidding; it is enough to make the stoutest heart quail to behold it. Who could describe all the passionate thoughts and feelings of those who, beaten and buffeted about with the storms and waves of life, have been forced here at last, forced to own defeat in love and fortune, broken and ruined in health and estate, forced to humble to that fate they had fought so long against, and feared and dreaded for so many years, to cut themselves off from the world of joy, and renounce their little remaining shred of freedom and independence for ever and ever? Is there not deep tragedy in it? Perhaps some will not be willing to concede this, because it is not always evident. But are the deep things of life ever evident to the superficial gazer? If a man does not always weep and howl, do you think he has no sensibility? Do you deny him emotions and a soul? Are there not "thoughts that lie too deep for tears"? The man of true temper and courage never wears his heart on his sleeve. The deepest misery is a dumb misery. Because a person is poor and a beggar, that does not make his sensibility less; very often it intensifies it. This poor creature looks at

you in a very dazed and vacant manner; that one expresses worlds of despair and wretchedness; here is one cowering and shrinking like a hunted beast; another turns his head away from you for shame; here is one whose eyes are truly imploring: are not all these possessed of deep, a superabundance of deep, feeling? Do they not all, somehow or other, express the real, the only true, tragic quality? Of course they do. Language they have not, goods they have not, friends they have not, fine clothes they have not, they are life's cast-offs, the world's "not wanted," the sweepings and shavings, the dust and rags of society; but they are flesh and blood, of our stamp and image, wearers of the same form, the same mind and intellect, body, soul, and spirit as the best of us living. There is more real tragedy at the workhouse gate than is written in half the ranting, mawkish plays exhibited in the theatres nowadays, though the dullard may not be sensible of it, and the generality of people are in too desperate a hurry to pander to their own wants and ailments to bestow more than the most casual thought on those of their less fortunate fellow-creatures.

At the same time, no one in his right mind would claim that all is tragedy there—that would be a great error, a positive falsehood; it is only so in the case of those who are forced, greatly against their own will and soul, to accept the refuge; it is only so to the brave and the true, to those possessed of character and principle; the coward and the hypocrite are utterly incapable of tragedy altogether. For many enter in the workhouse doors willingly, without

any reluctance at all. For them it is simply an escape from the onerous responsibilities of life, from the necessity of having to toil hard to procure a livelihood. Henceforth they are free, secure, and satisfied; they do not mind the penalties and restrictions, or, at any rate, not very much, and a short residence there soon brings about a spirit of total acquiescence. They are not all like old Mark Titcombe, who, weak and infirm at eighty-five, his last bit of savings spent, would rather have been butchered in bed than taken from his cottage and carted off to "that place over yander, to the 'firmary." That is a smooth hypocrisy, used to beguile the simple and ignorant. "It is not really the workhouse you are going to, you know," they tell the old people, "but only the infirmary." As if that were not an integral part of the system, and one of the most distressing at that.

Beside those who suffer tragedy, then, at entering the dark abode, there are those who go in willingly enough, or with very little reluctance—the morally weak and incompetent; others who experience the comfort of relief—such as have surely felt want, and whose one thought is to be rescued from it in the easiest way possible; some who hail the sight of the walls with real pleasure—the periodical tramps and visitors, the physically hungry and destitute; and, wonder of wonders! those who go in of their own accord, who, although possessed of some kind of a home, plead to be admitted to get out of the reach of their families, friends, and kindred. So, while some are dragged in, suffering hell pains, and others

enter with a weakly "I will, and yet would not," this one with an inner satisfaction, a kind of "what is to be will be" feeling—all fully aware and certain that their liberties are to be the price of their admittance—these last, by a strange irony, by the height of paradox, come hither to obtain their independence, as if they should re-echo that familiar cry, "Save us from our friends." So, beside the genuinely poor and aged, together with the infirm of all classes, there is the skulker, the vagabond or professional tramp, the unfortunate person, the besotted drunkard, the erstwhile evil-liver, and that upright and honest, yet pathetically mistaken and deluded creature, the self-sacrificer—the swearer away of his rights and liberties, unusual, unnatural, and incomprehensible.

The workhouse, dingy and drab-looking, lies off the road somewhat, sixty or seventy paces. The entrance to it is barred with stout iron gates, which are generally fastened and locked, day and night as well. High elm-trees overshadow the entrance, and continue in a line along the hedgerow there. Just within is the porter's lodge—a little hut big enough to contain two persons—fitted with a stove for use in cold weather; to the right and left, before the house, are some shrubs and evergreens, which look almost black from the road. On the one hand, going in, is a patch of turf with goal-posts, where the juvenile paupers forget their situation in the excitement of a game occasionally; on the other, are gardens for flowers and vegetables. Farther down on the left are outhouses and buildings where the tramps and

roadsters, who are admitted for the night, pay off their score the next morning with a little healthy exercise with the saw and hatchet, or other implement. Beyond that is more ground for vegetables, worked by the permanent "staff" of the place. Here is the school play-yard, walled round, and fenced in with iron railings like a prison; this is the shoemaker's, and there is the tailor's shop. In the front part are the master's quarters, the Board-room, and the offices; adjoining these is the workhouse proper, where the paupers are confined. The infirmary is a new building, and is situated at the rear.

The greater portion of the tragedy is here, for those detained in the other parts, though poor and unfortunate, are able-bodied enough; these are doubly wretched, in that they have no possessions of any sort, and are afflicted with diseases as well, more often of a permanent kind: there is no hope of escape for them. "What is that man there?" I asked one old fellow, well over eighty. "Is he going out again?" "I dunno; I dun expect so," he replied. "A lot as comes in stops here till they dies." That is it precisely. The old fellow was there waiting for death to relieve him, too; but though he could see and dimly understand the fates of others, he had not fully grasped the position in regard to himself. Other people's misfortunes generally strike us more forcibly than our own.

There are all sorts of people in the infirmary, afflicted with many and various complaints, and a few with none at all beyond that of extreme old age. Very many of them are old roadsters, who have

tramped, and tramped, and tramped, until their legs were quite worn out, and they could go no farther on the journey. Their friends are dead—if they ever had any, that is; their kindred dead too. A great many of them never had a home; they have drifted and drifted about from place to place, town to town, village to village, from one county to another, workless, aimless, and careless, happy enough, no doubt, until Time clapped his hand heavily on their shoulder and cried to them: "Hold! you have gone far enough." Henceforth no more highway, white and dusty under the summer sky, or brown and muddy in autumn, or frozen in winter. No more lying down in green fields, and under shady trees, or camping in the lanes, with wallet crammed full of provisions begged from house to house along the road through the village. No more sleeping in the open air, and kindling the little fire in the early morning with a few dry, rotten twigs from the hedgerow, to prepare the steaming beverage —the water obtained from the last cottage or brook, and boiled in a tin with a wire handle; the tea and sugar begged also from some compassionate cottager, or purchased at the little shop some way back upon the road. And no more pitiless rain, and getting drenched to the skin, and shivering in the cowshed, or under a haystack all night; or bleak and bitter wind and chilling tempest—hungry, cold, deeply wretched and miserable: for they must share pleasure and hardship too, wear the rose and the thorn, though more often the thorn, one would imagine. But liberty and independence are sweet; one is sometimes tempted to envy the tramp's easygoing manner

and irresponsibility. They have entered here for the last time now, and will leave no more, until their old bones are haled away to the churchyard.

A great many of these are confined to their beds, and do not move about the ward; and while, here and there, you may induce one to talk a little, others are moody and sullen, and will have nothing to do with you; it will be best not to interfere with them. After all, there is no reason why a man, even though he be a tramp, should be made the victim of everyone that passes through the place. Compassion is all very well in a way, but when it is so closely combined with vulgar curiosity as to be almost totally indistinguishable from it, it is wise to be considerate in the exhibition of it. The tramp's habit of life invests him with a certain amount of reserve, and even of defiance; that is his characteristic. Most likely it was the early quality that determined him to adopt that manner of life, too; so we must expect it to be no less in evidence at an advanced age. You cannot break their spirit of independence: they maintain this to the last. Some of them, to be sure, will talk with you, and tell you all about themselves; but the best way to effect this is to take them on the road. Here, if you have leisure, and a few pence to spare, you may easily obtain your value back again in narrative.

The other night, coming home from work in the dark in January, a voice hailed me out of the mist and shadows, and inquired the way to the "house," and the distance. Drawing near, and halting, I could see it was an old man with a long grey beard, and billy-

cock hat. He had no wallet or bundle of any kind. His voice was low and musical; he was evidently town-bred; he spoke very courteously; you liked him immediately. His name was William Lines, age sixty-nine and a half, by trade a tin-smith. "How far have you come?" "From Nottingham, sir." "And where going?" "To Bath, sir." "Don't 'sir' me, there's a good fellow. Got any friends?" "No! Well, not that I know of." "No sons to help you?" "I had two, but I don't know where they are. They were both in the army at the time of the war; but I think they enlisted under other names. I have never heard of them since." "Where have you lived all this time?" "I was born at Bath, sir; then worked at London for a time, after at Worcester, and since at Nottingham. I have not done a lot for some years now, but have wandered about from place to place. You see, I thought if I could get to Bath, my pension will be due in six months' time, and I might rub along then a little. How far is it to Bath from here?" "About thirty-five miles." "That will take me three more days, for I cannot get along very fast." I gave the old man what money I had, with many apologies—it was no more than three-farthings, if I must confess a personal matter—shook him mightily by the hand, and wished him good luck and his pension. He took the small gift generously, thanked me profusely, and with a "God bless you, sir," and a kindly "Good-night," went on his way. I hope that by this time he has received the coveted weekly allowance, and has fallen in with some one or other of his boyhood acquaintances, and is moderately

comfortable, at all events, for he seemed a most genial and affable character.

The other occupants of the infirmary are a miscellaneous lot. They are of all sorts, sizes, and ages. Here is a little mite of four years who fell in the fire and was burned severely. He is nearly well now, and is looking bright and bonny. He sits up in bed surrounded with picture-books, and looks wonderingly around, shedding sunshine everywhere. Even the crusty old tramps are interested in him, and, though too moody to smile, watch his every movement with visible pleasure and amusement. The nurses are very fond of him, and wish he would stay longer, but his mother will soon fetch him away home now. The husband is seldom in work; they are very poverty-stricken. Here is a boy of fourteen who looks fat and well enough, but suffers from fits. He is in indefinitely, though in time the weakness may pass from him. This young fellow has a weak heart, and is incapable of fighting the battle of life. His old mother has no home. She lives with another son, one of several, all of whom are poor, with large families. There is nothing left for him but the "house." He serves on the staff, and is responsible for many duties to be performed about the ward.

In another bed, close at hand, is one very white and emaciated. He looks at me long and earnestly. Walking up to him, I recognize one I had often seen about the factory. He recognized me in return. I took him by the hand, and our eyes met. There was no need to speak; it was too, too evident. He was in the last stage of consumption. Death had marked

him for his own, and set his seal upon him. His eyes were dim and swimming, sunken and hollow. When he looked at you, though his lips did not move, he expressed volumes. I felt a cowardly sensation. His cheeks were shrunken; the bones almost protruded through the skin. The lips were strained; he was very white about the mouth. His hands were skinny and clammy with perspiration; he was no more than a skeleton. Perhaps his age was thirty or thereabout. I do not think we spoke half a dozen words each; he was too weak to converse. Our eyes interpreted our thoughts and feelings. Then I passed up the ward, but I know he watched me as long as I remained visible. The next time I went to the "house" his bed was occupied by another; he was gone and forgotten. Who cares about a pauper? Get them out of the way quickly, and make room for others.

Who is this pitiable-looking wretch coming through the doorway here, with his head swathed in bandages, and only a small part of his face visible, and even that a loathsome sore, his nose eaten away, his cheeks eaten, too, the evil spreading all round his neck, under his chin, and everywhere? At the first sight of him I thought of the "Leper of the City of Aoste," as told by Count de Maistre, for the description is identical with the appearance of this man—face eaten away, totally unrecognizable, horrible and ghastly-looking. On inquiry I learn he has been in the army, and contracted the disease somewhere abroad. It spreads slowly, and is not infectious, they say. But how shocking for the poor patient, and disagreeable for the other inmates! One sight

of the unfortunate fellow is enough to set nature in revolt; but I suppose the others are used to seeing him, and take no notice of his ailment.

There is quite a crowd here from the neighbouring town—cast-offs from the factory and others—ruined in health, and otherwise unfit for service; it is a striking testimony to the efficacy of modern industrial and urban conditions in producing physical wrecks and paupers. The majority of these are young men between thirty and forty, some afflicted one way and some another. In the natural order of things they have a long way to travel on Life's road; theirs is not by any means a pleasing prospect or an illuminated future. Let us hope they are deficient in imagination, for to a person of any thought and penetration it would be hideous; it would be enough to drive him to distraction. Of the genuine agricultural class there are very few; that is a matter for congratulation. Here and there, of course, where a man outlives all his relatives and friends, and becomes bedridden, he is forced to come into the "house"; but the superior health of the rustic stands him in good stead, and if he has any children they usually see to it that he is spared the disgrace of the "union." If they do come here at last they will not live very long. Old John Lane, who clung to his little cot at Cat's Brain till he was eighty, and was fetched inside, only survived a week, and Mark Titcombe died in three months. The man of independent spirit is deeply wounded at being brought to the workhouse; he is struck to the soul with it; it will be most likely to prove mortal.

Albert Trueman, exactly seventy, whom I met in the yard as I was going in, was pacing up and down like a caged beast. "Here," thought I, "is one ill at ease, who cannot be reconciled with his condition." A little conversation with him soon verified my conjecture. He was a most diminutive man. He was scarcely four feet high, with the tiniest of features. In one eye he was stone blind; he could only see a very little with the other; by raising his head and turning it on one side he could just discern you. At first he thought I was an official. I soon set his mind at rest on that point. Where was he born? "At Highworth." "What! just out here?" "Yes, sir." "And what happened afterwards?" "Then we went to Wanborough. That's where I went to school." "Yes." "Do you know Wanborough, sir?" "Oh yes, I am often there." "Then we went to live at Bishopstone." "Yes, I know Bishopstone too." "I knows every inch of they hills, sir." I felt drawn very near to him. "But what did you do after that, and how did you lose your sight?" "After that I went to London, sir, and kept a coffee-shop at Vauxhall, and then a little hotel, and done well at it, too." "But your eyes?" "I got a cataract, and underwent an operation. The same doctor done it, sir, as took the one from Mr. Gladstone's." "Yes." "But they got bad again, you know, and I can't see at all on this one, and only a bit with the other." "What did you do then?" "Lost everything, sir, and got my living selling matches." Here he took an empty vesta-box from his pocket, and showed me the kind. "But how did you get here?"

"Walked it through Hungerford last fall. I wanted to see the old country. I hadn't see the Shepherd's Rest for fifty years. But I wants to get out of here. Bless you, sir, I can't rest like some of 'em. I wants to get my living. You see, I am seventy, and if I can get my pension I can earn some more beside and muddle along. But I can't stop in here; there ent a bit of peace night nor day. Remember me, sir, and do what you can for me. I am going to see the pension officer next week."

Poor man! I sympathized with him—as hypocrites always do—and took my leave. If it had been in my power I would have made him happy there and then, if for no other reason than that he knew the hills, and had worked there, but I was powerless to render him any material assistance. "To be weak is miserable, doing or suffering," Milton said. There are times when this strikes you very forcibly. Strength very often seems to be in the possession of the wrong individual.

Robert Brooks came from the village to the infirmary. He is eighty-five, and was once well-to-do. His people were farmers. He has plenty of kindred even now, in good circumstances, but who wants to be saddled with an old man? Robert Brooks was born at Stanford-in-the-Vale. He can still remember the riots. He heard them blow the horn, and saw them march up the street in a body. When he was a young man he went oversea to New Zealand. Did he make money? Well, not much. Perhaps he was too refined; he was always most gentlemanly. But he was not destitute. When he came home again he

went to live with relations; he was never married. It is a repetition of the old story. Someone dies; the old bonds are broken; you are not wanted any more. So Robert went to live at the cottage with the cowman. Then he, too, removed, and the old man had to do the best he could, and find fresh lodgings. Only old "Madame" Pewsey would take him in. Then his legs gave way; the doctor said he must come to the "house." There I saw him in the infirmary. It is truly pathetic. Does he feel it very much? You must guess that, for he says but little. Gentle he is, and kind, and intelligent, courteous and superior, sensitive, too; but he does not complain. Every Sunday morning he walked through the fields to church. I have met him scores of times, and worked with him, too, years ago. It is cruel to think he should be confined in the workhouse walls with those of wasted lives and inferior characters. There is an element of tragedy in his case, or nowhere at all.

Tom Chamberlain, or "Chamblin," as they say, the Crimean veteran, also of the village, need not have come to the workhouse at all, but he applied for admittance, and pays for his keep into the bargain, which is quite unique, and a revelation of character, regrettable though it be. He could not get on with his people, and he could not stand the children. The martial spirit is strong in him. He is not disagreeable, but he is extraordinarily restless. He cannot be still, not he! The tramp, tramp, tramp of the regiments still sounds in his ears; the motion of the armies took possession of him; he will never be at

peace this side of the grave. After fighting in the Crimea with the French and Turks, at Alma and Inkermann, he came home and worked on the farm again. The contrast of the fields, the quiet and isolation, preyed on him somewhat; he developed this spirit of unrest, sternness, testiness, if you will have it so, but he remained strong, courageous, military, and patriotic with it. True virtue does not consist in mere affability. The finest metal is the toughest and hardest; that will cut a way through everything. It is the same with the human temper. The soft edge is easily blunted, the rigid character overcomes all things.

The old man is a true type of the army veteran. He is tall and medium built, though he stoops slightly now. He has a fine face, even features, red cheeks, and thin, pointed nose. His hair is grey. He wears a moustache, which is continued around his mouth and underneath the chin. This is grey too; he is the picture of what we like to think an old soldier should be. How proud he is of his medal! Every Sunday he wore it, pinned on his coat with blue ribbon. He worshipped it almost. When he came to church with it, he walked up the nave in veritable triumph; it was just that pardonable pride in the possession of a trophy that pleases so well. If you converse with him, he is full of the sights and experiences of battle; he is white-hot with it. "I fowt in blood up to my knees," he declares to you solemnly. He hated the "Rooshans" like poison, and scorned the French soldiers: "The dirtiest devils alive," he styles them. The Turks were the best of the lot, in his estimation.

He can tell you of many hardships, the horrors of war, the suffering, the bitter cold of winter, piercing frost, and famine. He was happy to return back to old England. He received a pension for his service, and is really very well-to-do. It is a pity he cannot be settled out of the workhouse, but he protests to you that he is quite happy and satisfied, and if that is so, he may as well choose his own dwelling, for satisfaction is the general goal of life, though few indeed are they who ever succeed in attaining to it.

There is an interesting character in the old men's ward. He used to be gatekeeper for many years, and was a schoolmaster by profession. He was surprised that anyone should be interested in him. "This place is a hell to me," he said fervently, "there is no one at all to speak with, no one at all." He looked round on the others: "The best time they ever had in their lives, most of them," he declared; "they love it. Oh, if I had only known it, if I only had! But there, it's no use now." He was born in Oxfordshire. They were well-to-do. "I hear you were a schoolmaster." "Yes." "Now, tell me all about it." "My first school was near Marlborough; that was in '64. I have spent many happy hours in the Forest at Savernake. Then I went on the *Indefatigable* in the Mersey." "Yes." "After that I went to Wrexham, then near Snowdon, but I did not get on so well among the Welsh. After that I had a school in Surrey, that was my last." "And why did you leave that?" "Disagreed with the parson over High Church matters, and was forced to quit. My

dear mother died at that time. I spent all my money. Father didn't want me. My brothers were well off, but they didn't want me either. I tramped about from place to place, came to Swindon, got a job, clerk to an insurance agent at 12s. a week, and lost it, and that's how I came to be here." I forbore to ask him of the future, for he has great sensibility, and that is pretty obvious. He is seventy now. What hope is there remaining for him in that place—what hope, I say? I will leave you to answer the question.

In the ward with the old veteran were a little lad of ten in consumption, waiting his turn at the sanatorium; another of about the same age with skin troubles; a blacksmith who had been operated on for spinal disease and pronounced incurable; one in bed with hopeless rheumatism; another with heart and lung disease, who, when he breathed, lifted himself half out of bed, and whose days are certainly numbered, though he spoke to me very cheerfully; and another lying like death itself. Several times I asked him, as kindly as I could, what was the matter, but received no answer, or thought I did not, though his eyes met mine, then he turned them aside. Stooping still closer to him I repeated, "What *is* the matter with you?" Then his lips moved, though very faintly—no sound came from them—but I could tell from their motion it was "Heart." His dinner, a large cup of stew and a thick chunk of bread, stood on the locker untouched beside him; the other inmates went on with their meal, and took no notice of him. Dying! A slow lingering death, and the

others beside him as well. Without, the great world goes on its course. The happy and prosperous, the smug and comfortable, arise, go forth, eat, drink, enjoy life, and home to rest. Thought! Pity! Condolence! What? For whom? What do you mean? I do not understand you! Selfishness! Greed! Personal pride! Tragedy! Tragedy!

CHAPTER VI

Burton Grove—The fish-pond—Launcelot Whitfield—Jemmy Boulton—Betsy Horton—"Grubby" and "Scamp"—Mowing and hay-making—Mare's milk—The Hay Festival—Reaping the wheat—Harvest-cart—The Harvest-home.

HERE we are in the village again, on our way to Burton Grove—Beerton, a good many of the folk call it—the home of old Launcelot Whitfield. The farm lies off the road in the fields; it is very picturesque. The front overlooks a large meadow, which in turn borders the highway. Over opposite, on high ground, stands Hunt's Copse Farm, wonderfully situated. In the hollow is Broadmoor Copse; to the right, little Gardner's Garn, teeming with birds, and bees, and primroses in the season. A roadway through the fields leads you in to Burton Grove. Halfway through you pass near the fish-pond. This lies in a hollow, and is surrounded with tall elms. This is the accumulated waters of a tiny spring, which has its origin there. The overflow escapes at the end nearest the road, and runs down towards the village. The pond used to abound in fish, especially roach and pike. I have seen specimens of the latter kind over twelve pounds in weight taken there, though the pond is not very large. Jemmy Boulton, the carter, always said the pond

overflowed in thunder weather, which is plausible enough. At such times we used to watch at the escape for little fish that occasionally got washed over. I remember, one summer, the brook which flows through the village was teeming with small pike; every little pool contained from two to six, about half a pound in weight. Where they came from is a mystery. I never saw any there before, nor have since. They could not have come from this fish-pond, for the spring is swallowed up some distance after leaving the pool.

Burton Grove is a large farm-house, with much land attached, pasture and arable too. It is surrounded with sheds and buildings and provided with a huge barn. Here is an orchard, well stocked with apple-trees and filberts. Adjoining this is a spacious garden; two handsome black beeches shade the house on the western side. At the rear is the entrance to the dairy—many cows are kept—and here is the old brewhouse, with the wide hearth, the scene of many "harvest-homes," teas, and suppers, in times gone by. What games have been played here! What blazing logs, and flames leaping up the chimney! How the old roof rang with the songs and laughter! The great pots, stuffed full of hams and good things, hung from the irons here; here the wooden tables were set, and the benches all round—but we are not come to harvest-home yet. The rick-yard—rick-barken, the old people called it—is farther away, and surrounded with elms, too. The neighbourhood swarmed with owls. Every night you could hear them, to the right of you, and to the

left of you, before and behind; in the trees high up over you, and close by your very head they seemed to come, and startle you with their loud screams and the familiar "Tu-whit, u-whoo-oo-oo!" just as they did about the castle of Macbeth that fateful night when he murdered Duncan, King of the Scots.

The chief thing about Burton Grove was old Launcelot himself and his staff. The principal of these were Jemmy Boulton the carter, the fogger, the shepherd, and Betsy Horton, the little quaint old woman who lived in the tiny wattle-and-daub cottage by the highway. These were not all the farm-hands. There were Grubby and Scamp, and Smithy, the under-carters and ploughmen, day men and women, "half-timers" from school, and a troop of young girls beside, who helped with the hay and harvest; for if Launcelot was queer in some respects, he was a great believer in labour; and though he exploited the young people, perhaps, it was no more for cheapness' sake than because he just liked to see them about, and have them with him. During the greater part of the year there were seventeen hands employed in one way and another, whereas nowadays you would see no more than six or eight at the outside, though the same quantity of land is in cultivation. But the arable land is not kept as clean now as it was at that time. Women are not employed to "pick the couch," or to pull docks, charlock, and thistles, as formerly; what the machine cannot do is left undone. For one thing, the women of the village would not be seen doing the work nowadays; and as for the young girls, how it would

soil and blister their pretty fingers to use the hoe or paddle, and how stained and browned they would be with the milk of the dandelion and sow-thistle! But you should have heard the girls sing at work in old Launcelot's fields years ago, when I was a boy and toiled with them; it would have done your heart good. They were as happy as all the birds in the air, and did not wear that look of superiority and self-consciousness which is becoming more and more general everywhere throughout the land. Nell Smith, the old shepherd's daughter of Sennington, used to help her dad with the sheep and lambs, and work like a man on the land, and was healthy and strong as anyone alive; and a good, honest young woman, too, into the bargain, a sound, useful wife for any working man in the country.

Launcelot was tall and square, strong, and well built. His head was massive—broad forehead, beetle brows, small, ferret eyes, rather fierce looking; high cheek-bones, thick nose, mouth pursed up, top lip clean-shaven; short, iron-grey beard under the chin; stern and severe in general appearance; hale and hearty-looking, every inch a yeoman; in uniform he would have made a good "beef-eater." In cool weather he wore a velvet coat and flat-topped boxer hat; in summer and autumn a loose holland jacket, and broad-brimmed straw. Wherever he went about the farm he carried a paddle—less often the gun. As soon as he caught sight of a thistle-root, or dock, or any other weed, up it had to come in a moment; he was certain destruction to noxious and parasitic plants. Where the master set such a good example,

the workpeople were sure to follow; if they saw anything "maaster" had missed they quickly pulled it up; that is the reason the land was much cleaner than it is now.

In manner Launcelot was variable. In the first place he had a temper, and when that was roused he looked at you as black as a thunder-cloud, or went livid with passion, and shouted out, and called you wooden-head in a moment, though he was immediately himself again, and did not bear any ill-will, no matter what offence you had given him. He was generally quiet and reserved, and did not interfere very much with the work-people. He walked round the farm once every morning, and carried the paddle or gun under his arm. As he walked he had a peculiar way of raising and dropping the head and eyes at every few steps. If he did this quickly he was incensed, if more slowly he was normal. All the men sharpened up a little when maaster was at hand, and relaxed slightly when he had gone, but not much; there was no need at all to skulk, for in spite of Launcelot's small peculiarities, he was a downright good master; hot-tempered, if you like, but broad-minded and generous, a payer of fair wages, liberal with food and beer, sympathetic and charitable. But he hated all nonsense and make-believe; Launcelot was altogether a plain, outspoken man. When he addressed the carter it was sometimes as "Boulton," and sometimes "Jemss." Jemmy usually replied with "Ya-as, sir," or "Naw, sir," or plain "Eece." He was the master's lieutenant, and worthy of the confidence, too. When Launcelot wanted the

stable-lad, he generally shouted loudly for "Grubb," or "Grubby," or "Grubaxe," or "Peckaxe," or "Stick-in-the-Mud," according to the humour he was in. The latter came cloutering along the pitched way from the stables, quaking in his boots; he dreaded to have to face the maaster when he was not pleased. Even old Betsy used to get it occasionally. One morning, by mistake, she got among some young corn, and Launcelot, coming to the field, fell in a towering rage. "Hi! hi!" he shouted, "what bist thee at ther? Come off o' that." But the wind was the wrong way, and she could not hear. Then, waxing hotter, he turned round and roared out, "Go and tell her to come off. If 'a dwunt come off quick, damn if I dwunt shoot the old bitch." But he was good and kind to the old dame, for all his temper, and she almost worshipped him for it in return.

Jemmy Boulton, the carter, was an ideal character. He was nearly as broad and thick as he was long. His face was round and red as the rising sun almost. His shoulders were round with fat, too, and his belly was like a barrel. The old fellow's head was thick and chubby, the face shone; thick Dutch nose, merry twinkling eyes, top lip clean-shaven; broad, smiling mouth; thin fringe of beard under the chin, the ends of which, viewed sideways, projected upwards in a crescent like the new moon; his was a hearty and jolly countenance, the expression of good health, fair living, a contented mind, a jovial spirit, good-nature, and good-humour, wit, intelligence, frankness, simplicity, and honesty; he was as fair a man you would ever wish to meet. The top of his head

was bald; he wore the billy-cock hat; in height he was about five feet. You seldom saw him without the short, white smock, reaching nearly to the knees. On Sundays he wore a new one, which his wife had worked for him. His trousers were of corduroy, his boots strong and thick, made to measure by the village shoemaker. In the winter he wore leather gaiters that reached up the thighs. He carried his dinner in a broad, flag basket, and usually bore a long whip with numerous well-polished brass ferrules up the handle, of which he was greatly proud. He knew the roads for many miles around, and had gone with his team in every direction within a radius of twenty miles, which was a considerable world for a carter to be acquainted with thirty years ago.

As to Jemmy's character, there will be scarcely any need to speak of this; you will have already perceived it from his exterior, for it agreed precisely with the description I have given. He was very shrewd and witty, hard to beat, and hard to teach, where he could not grasp a thing naturally; well versed in his profession of carter; able to plough and sow, reap and mow, milk, or anything else; ignorant of books—he could neither read nor write—and fond of a good large mug of ale. He and Dudley Sansum were bosom friends well met, both jovial and convivial; and both were members of the old village Benefit Club. You should have seen Jemmy carrying the big flag, and waving it to and fro at the head of the procession on anniversary days round the village! How very proud he was of that blue silk with gold letters and fringe! That was the happiest day of all

the year to him; and then the big fat dinner at the club-room, washed down with plenty of foaming ale, and the band playing. When the old carter was somewhat over sixty, he came home from work one night, kicked his boots off at the foot of the stairs, and said bluntly, "I done now," and went straight up to bed and never got up any more.

Betsy Horton was very tiny and insignificant in stature; she was not more than four feet high. Her face was very wrinkled and sunburnt, like leather almost, for all her life had been spent in the open fields, and chiefly upon the corn-land, summer and winter too. At one time she picked couch, or pulled docks and thistles, hoed the young roots, made hay, tied the corn after the reapers, fed the threshing machine, cleaned and pitted the swedes in autumn, and helped the shepherd all the winter. Her nose was straight; she had large brown eyes, strong features. Her general expression was most quaint; she was an old-fashioned little body. Her grey hair was parted in the middle, and tied up in a little wisp behind, or contained in the net. She wore a blue print sun-bonnet and a coarse brown apron to work, with thick boots. When it was too wet to work out of doors she helped "Missis" at the farm, or Launcelot found her employment in repairing the sacks. Her cottage being so small, and her furniture small too, she had but little housework to do; it could all be performed inside an hour. At half-past four or five o'clock Betsy came home from the field; you soon saw the smoke going up from the chimney; she generally carried home a small bundle of dry wood from

the field to kindle the fire. Then the old-fashioned blue cups and saucers were forthcoming, the table was set, and tea was brewed. Bread and butter was the usual fare, or a little cold boiled bacon; she drank her tea without milk. On Sundays she wore a black gown, and a tiny bonnet perched back upon the head; she looked quainter than ever then.

Betsy was very simple in manner and behaviour; how could she be otherwise? She could not read or write. When her "bwoy Tom" went to Australia the neighbours had to read her the letters. She was slavishly obedient to Launcelot and his interests, and never spoke of him but with the profoundest respect; it was "Maas Whitful" this, and "Maas Whitful" that, to every one. The neighbours had much fun at her expense, for Betsy was very absent-minded, and often made ridiculous answers to questions. But she was kind and true; her heart, rough as it was, was of pure gold; she had lived a hard life, and yet was remarkably cheerful and happy at the end of it.

As for all the others about the farm, "Missis" and "Miss," "Vogger," old Reuben the shepherd, "Grubby," "Scamp," and the rest, I cannot stop to tell of them. First as to "Missis," she was an invalid. "Miss," the only child, was sharp, clever, and tactful, and full of business, riding with Launcelot to market in the high trap every Monday, and assisting him many ways, and waiting on the farm people beside; drawing the ale, cutting up the bread and cheese, and sometimes paying them their wages too. "Vogger" was son to Betsy, and was full of fun

and mischief; Reuben was old and quiet, Grubby was as stolid as a pillar, and Scamp as fat as a porker, and mischievous, as his nickname implies. The other men were day-workers. The girls and young women, ranging in age from twelve to eighteen, were as full of sparkling fun and gaiety as youth could ever hope to be, and could sing like thrushes. The time passed quickly in the fields where they were; work was easy; they were laughing and singing or prattling away all the time, brown as berries, but happy, fit, and well. I was a small boy of eight years when I worked the first summer among them.

I shall never forget those early days in the fields; that was my first experience at real work. Old Launcelot had sent down to the school for boys and girls to help with the haymaking. I was one of those chosen to go forth and put my shoulder to the wheel, or my hand to the implement. About all I really did do, though, was to lead the horses, carry the wooden bottles of ale to and from the farm, or rake up the hay with the girls; but I felt very important, especially when the time came round to receive my wages for the task—a bright two-shilling piece every week-end. How strong the sun shone in the meadows! How strange and far-off the hills looked to be! And how beautiful the trees, and copses, and hedges were to my boyish eyes! I can still see the far-off corn-fields quivering with the heat, the near meadows trembling too, the tall elms like spectres, everything in nature stock still, as though it were painted so; not a breath of air, not a sound but the tinkle of the mowing machine half

a mile away, the rattle of the waggons, the voices of the pitchers and loaders, and the young girls laughing and talking as they raked away behind. The dense hedges were covered with wild-rose and blackberry bloom ; here the boughs were thick with sloe or wild bullace, crabs or wilderns, but there was hardly any shadow. Old Jemmy's face was red as fire ; he was stripped to the waist, all but his shirt, and the sweat rolled down his nose and dropped on to the ground, but he laughed and talked and chaffed the girls, and shouted "stand firm" to the loader all the time ; he was just in his element, and the hours passed like magic. How different it all was from the long dragging day, the smoke, and filth, and fume, the foul stench and suffocating dust and atmosphere of the factory! The sweat of the open fields is clean and sweet, yielded naturally ; that of the other place, before the furnace, is wrung from your very heart and soul in anguish, leaving you faint, weary, powerless, and exhausted. The other is gentle, medicinal, corrective, and salutary.

The grass crops were fit to be cut about mid-summer, though a little depends on the season. If the milky showers drip well in the beginning of June, they will soon produce a good bottom growth. A few days' sunshine then will have a magical effect ; you can almost see the grass grow with the eye. The meadow-crowfoot rears its gold crown higher and higher with matchless brilliance ; the beautiful crimson of the sorrel unfolds and mingles richly with it ; lady's-smock blooms along the trenches between the lands ; here is the deeply purple or white orchis—

goosey ganders we called them—there the pretty pink ragged robin, patches of yellow rattle, trefoil, cat's-ear, knapweed, pink and white clover (field honeysuckle) and a host of other modest little denizens of the meadow; the fields at this time are in their truest glory. This is too early for cutting; the grass is too green and sappy, and needs to be a little more mature. A few days' sunshine prepares it for the scythe or mowing-machine. Then the crowfoot fades milky white, and sheds its petals, the sorrel turns brownish in colour, the lady's-smock withers, and the ragged robin. The bennets and grasses come to seed as well; it is time to think of harvesting the crop.

For several days old Jemmy had been preparing the "sheen," cleaning and oiling the parts, sharpening the knives, and getting everything ready to begin the mowing. He had his headquarters in the cart-house; there he filed and filed, and hammered and tinkered till all was in perfect order. The special harness for the mares was cleaned and oiled; he made a cushion for himself, to fix on the seat, out of a sack stuffed with hay; his long whip was ready; he used cords for reins. When the tops of the grasses were turning ripe and the weather was settling down fine, Launcelot gave the word. Jemmy coupled up the two young mares and set out for the field. They were very frightened and restless at first with the rattle of the machine; Jemmy tugged the reins, struck them sharply with the whip, and scolded them soundly with "Now then-a," and "Wai then," and "Stand still, oot." They pawed about, then started

forward, then ran back, now wheeled round, till at last they came to understand what was required. Then, nodding their heads quickly, one against the other, they half ran toward the gate leading to the meadow, nearly shaking Jemmy from the seat. So he set about the first field, going round, and round, and round the piece, sometimes halting a moment to clear the cut grass from the knife at an angle, and take a wet of ale from the bottle; then on again, with jacket and waistcoat thrown aside, and broad-brimmed felt hat; now flicking the horses with the whip, or gripping the lever which raised the knife in passing over a trench or gutter. The machine tinkled merrily; the flanks of the mares became white with the foam of the perspiration; the sun shone hotter and hotter. About nine o'clock Jemmy stopped for lunch—a mouthful of bread and cheese, and a long pull at the bottle. This time the mares were allowed to eat their lunch, too; a pile of the sweet juicy grass was set before them, and the iron bit was removed from the mouth. Now Launcelot came strolling up, paddle in hand, and sometimes turned a swath over with it, and soon departed again. Half an hour before noon Jemmy released the mares from the machine, and took them away to the farm for water and a rest till the evening; then back to the field and on again. You could hear the tinkle of the machine till late twilight; then he came down to the farm, had his supper in the brew-house—bread, cheese, lettuce, young onions, and abundant ale; then off home to bed. The next morning he might be up at three, and have done cutting by seven or eight, to save the

horses in the heat of the day, and mow the grass while the dew was in it. If he was going on mowing again at night he would take it easy in the midday; if not, he came out and joined the haymakers.

The first day the grass lay untouched. This was a general field day for the birds of all kinds, especially rooks, starlings, finches, and wagtails. They flock about everywhere when the grass has been cut, partly from curiosity, and partly because they find a great deal of food in the exposed roots of the grass. The second day the haymakers proper appeared, little Betsy and her school, the laughing girls and boys, the fogger too, and his young men. Some came with rakes and some with prongs, and pulled the swath over; others shook the thick heaps about; it was laugh and chatter, tease and prattle all the time. Betsy chimed in with the rest and interpolated a little wisdom now and then, and "We must get an wi't, else us shan't do much." At dinner-time the rakes were hung on the high hedge, the forks stuck into the earth; one and all gathered in the shade of the elm-trees and ate the meal, sitting on the ground. The girls had lemonade or milk for refreshment, sent from the farm; a fresh supply of ale was delivered up to the men.

About two days were sufficient to dry the grass and make the hay, if the sun was at all strong. After turning the swaths with the rake the "tedding" machine went over it once or twice, or it was done by hand; then the women and juveniles pulled it up into "wakes," and it was fit to carry. The bed of the rick had been made of bushes and old thatch in

the yard, and the elevator set. Then the waggons came out for gathering up the hay. There was one, or perhaps two pitchers, and there might be two loaders, though generally one. The small boy led the horse with a hempen halter; the women and girls raked the loose hay behind the waggon. How happy old Jemmy was at hay-cart, to be sure! How his old face beamed and shone! How broadly he smiled! And he kept talking away all the time, teasing and chaffing, or telling tales about this and that, but he worked hard, and kept the man on the waggon well employed. He thrust the steel pitchfork into the "wake," pushed it up as quick as thought, for four or six yards, inclining his head right and left at every step, accumulating a mighty heap, then plunged the fork downwards and lifted the whole lot high up above his head, and pitched it on the load in a jiffy. Then he shouted "Hold tight," or "Stand firm"; the horse proceeded a few yards, Jemmy shouted "Wai," or "Woa," and gathered up another pile.

As soon as a load was completed it was taken off to the yard; there were several teams going backwards and forwards; a constant supply of empty waggons was at hand. A short rest followed every load; the loader wanted refreshment, though sometimes the jar or bottle was thrown up to him on the waggon, or a grain of the fork was passed through the ear, and it was handed up that way. When Jemmy drank he usually went down on his knees and swallowed the liquid with extraordinary relish, though it was not very strong; it would have taken

a gallon or more to make one intoxicated. It was Jemmy's great delight to tell you how one year "the maaster" laid in a stock of Devonshire cider, and kept it in the dairy. Thinking to make it especially good and tasty, he procured a large quantity of raisins and put in with it; the cider fed on this and so derived great strength, flavour, and quality. When everything was at its busiest in the hay-field the cider was despatched off in big jars, and the ordinary gallon bottles. "Lore, ow we did get that down!" Jemmy said. And they did, in fact, too well, indeed; for long before the afternoon was out the men were all intoxicated together, and the work came to a standstill. Launcelot laughed ready to split his sides when they told him of it, and cried out "Well done!" heartily, but he did not repeat the experiment.

In the rick-yard the work proceeded busily, too. One threw the hay from the waggon into the box of the elevator, the machine raised it, then over it turned and fell on the rick below. Two or three were there to remove it, and pass it on to the builder; he laid the layers all round skilfully and evenly, and shaped the pile. A horse operated the elevator, walking round and round in a circle; a youngster walked round with it. Sometimes I did this, and at others helped in the field. When the hay had been cleared, I led the horse in the machine-rake. A young girl, four or five years my senior, walked behind and manipulated it, drawing down the lever that raised the rake and released the hay. The old mare, a grey, had a foal, I remember, and my companion was surprised to

learn that I had never tasted mare's milk. So one day, after dinner, she brought a small bottle and milked some into it, and gave it to me to drink, which I did, and afterwards I held my mouth under the teats, and she milked it into my mouth. I had never tasted it before, and I have not since, but it was very sweet, pleasant, and palatable, though thinner than cow's milk.

Haymaking generally lasted about three weeks, though it was sometimes interrupted by showery weather. At such times the men "tucked" the ricks, and the women and girls went "yelmin," that is, preparing haulms for the thatchers, when it was dry enough. The haystacks required to stand a few days to settle down before receiving the thatch; then the fogger set to work and covered them over, and clipped round the eaves, making it all look smart and tidy, and so on till the whole lot was done. After this came the "hay-home." This was a tea, not a supper, and was provided in the brew-house. Everyone who had helped with the hay was invited. The hour fixed was half-past five. This was after milking, and gave all the men an opportunity of sharing the meal. The old house had been well scrubbed out, the rough tables were spread with clean white covers, chairs and benches were set. We youngsters went attired in Sunday-best, the girls and young women the same. Old Betsy was there, too. She had been helping "missis" and "miss" all the afternoon, boiling the water, and cutting up the cake, and bread and butter. She wore a clean smart apron; her hair was most carefully brushed—for

a wonder; she was full of business and bustle. Presently Jemmy, the fogger, and the others came in, smelling a little of the rich milk, as milkers do, though that is not out of place on the farm. All sat down. "Now then, Betsy," Jemmy cried, "put I out a drap, come!" "Thee must wait a minute, till I sard these young uns fust," Betsy answered, and went on filling the cups. "Miss" tripped off to the dairy and brought more milk, fresh that afternoon. The large kettles steamed and hissed over the wood embers on the hearth; willing hands passed the viands round. There was cake, bread and butter, and cold ham, crisp sweet lettuce, young onions, mustard and cress. The girls laughed merrily; the ploughboys ate and drank till they were boiling hot. Old Launcelot looked in once or twice to see that all was well, and stood mopping his brow with his handkerchief in the doorway. He had just come back from viewing the corn. "Ow be gwain on wi't Jemss?" Launcelot inquired. "Aw, all right, maaster," the other answered. When all had had enough the tables were removed, and the girls and young women sang songs, and the boys as well, and afterwards played "tip it," and "kissing in the ring" till dark; then all flocked down the fields home together, singing all the way.

About three weeks after haymaking, harvest commenced, sometimes earlier; occasionally wheat is cut and carried too in July, though not often in the valley here. Here the soil is heavy and cold; the crops are consequently later, you must mount the downs to find early cutting and carrying. Old

Launcelot had all his cutting done by machine, unless the crop was down flat on the ground. Sam Davis, of Rove's Farm, another fine type of the English farmer, would not use a reaping-machine for years and years, but had all his done by hand, and made a good pile. I have heard that when his father first came to the place, he borrowed money from the carter to pay wages, and died finally worth £9,000. That is what conservative methods in farming did for him. His cattle were of the very finest, and he reared large numbers of sheep, and had threshing tackle beside; he employed many hands. Dudley Sansum, and Tommy Bowles, and Jemmy Boulton's wife Martha worked for him; he was a good master, and took his time with everything. It is the quiet farmer that thrives, generally; the one who is always cutting and paring, slashing and driving, is very often poor and in debt.

When the wheat became beautifully rich and yellow, and waved like a sea of gold under the slight breeze in August, and the time was fine and dry, old Jemmy rigged his machine and prepared to slaughter the ripe upstanding crop in Footpath field or Moonlights, as you go up the hill to Queenlains. First of all, a way was cut round the piece for the horses to walk, so as not to beat down the corn, for that is far too precious to waste. This was tied in sheaves and thrown back clear of the track for the horses. The machine was of the early type; there were no self-binders then. The cutting space of the knife was about four feet. Four huge arms swung round one after the other, with beaters between them.

These latter knocked the stalks down, and the arms, fitted with teeth like a rake, came along and thrust them clear of the machine, in quantities enough for a sheaf. Day men and women, or "strappers," did the tying up by the lump; five shillings an acre for binding and setting up in shocks was the price paid. There were three horses to draw the reaper. Grubby or Scamp rode the first, Jemmy sat on the machine. Round and round they went, hour by hour; they played great havoc in a short time; the pride of the field was soon laid low.

Perhaps you have not all had the opportunity of accompanying the reapers at their task, and following the machine round and round the corn-patch; the interest is of an engrossing and compelling nature. I could walk behind the wheels for hours and hours, and never be weary of it. Granted that the old method of reaping and fagging is the more purely natural and idyllic, and that the modern reaper or self-binder savours of the pressing needs of the time, all this is forgotten in the far-off fields, with the blue heavens and the skylarks; you enter heart and soul into the work, and come to appreciate and admire the clever mechanism which cuts the corn, collects it, binds the sheaves, and disposes of them with almost human touch and sympathy. What a delicious smell there is in the wake of the reaping-machine, too! The hay field is sweet, but the harvest field is far sweeter, just after the corn is cut; it is very balm, the quintessence of delightful odours and perfumes, rich and sensuous. The straw itself is fragrant. The thick white campion is sweetly fragrant, too; then

there are the scabious, corn-cockle, corn sow-thistle, pink and white convolvulus twining and clinging to the straws, and, sweetest of all, the deliciously scented corn-mint, growing everywhere through the field; the whole air is redolent with it, and especially in the heat of the day; then the sweetness seems intensified many times. These are not the only flowers of the cornfield by any means; the ground is covered with pretty creeping plants of every description, though these nestle closer, and often escape the knife of the reaping-machine. Here you may find the exquisite flowers of the pimpernel, the delicate little heartsease —"wild pansies" and "nuffinidles" we children called them—shepherd's needle, fumitory, red bartsia, black nightshade, mayweed, ox-tongue, and sometimes the striking blossoms of the succory, to say nothing of the wonderful brilliant poppy, so much at home everywhere in the cornfields and crops.

The reaping-machine is drawn at a good rate, up and down, round and round; there are not many words spoken. The sheaves are cast far enough out to leave sufficient room for the horses to pass; the edge of the corn, after the machine has gone by, is straight as a line. The part in which the knife operates is supported by a small wheel. A long sharp iron tooth precedes this, and divides the straws at the base; other smaller teeth are ranged along the knife-board. These divide the stalks again, and bring them into compressed contact with the blades, which travel to and fro within at great speed. There is real tragedy in the cutting. As the teeth displace the straws at the bottom the heads of

the stalks shake violently; in a second they are severed; for a fleeting space they remain upright, then stagger and totter, uncertain which way to fall, till the beaters swing round quickly, and knock them all down backwards. In the case of the old reaper, they accumulated till the toothed arm came and swept them aside; with the self-binder they are received on a revolving canvas sheet, and conveyed within the machine. The tall proud poppy and crowfoot are drawn in with them. Here they are collected and well shaken together to form a compact sheaf; presently the stout twine is clapped round, the knot tied automatically, and the string severed. Immediately the sheaf is released; steel fingers thrust it forward; down it slides and falls on to the ground. The "shocking-up" is done piece-work. This costs about eightpence an acre, as against five shillings for tying and setting after the old-fashioned method. The horse-power is the same; there is no need to point to the economic advantage; though no one seems to be the better off for the invention, at least they pretend not to be, but there is much in human nature to smile inwardly at; someone or other is bound to reap the benefit.

The ingathering of the corn-harvest is by far the most important feature of the farm year, especially where there is much arable land, or perhaps it may be all corn in some places, as on the downs, for instance. If the weather is wet in hay-time and the crop spoiled, that may not matter very much; but in the harvest, that is truly tragic! Who does not deeply grieve, apart from the monetary loss in-

volved, to see all that is left of the beautiful corn blackening and rotting in the fields, under the dark rainy skies of October and November, as is sometimes the case, utterly useless for anything but litter or manure, and the ground too wet and sodden to admit of collecting it for that purpose even? It seems as though you have lived the year for nothing then; that all the bloom and sunshine of the spring and summer were mockery; that Nature brought forth her beautiful children but to destroy them; that even she is cruel, deceitful, fickle, and wasteful. It is no wonder that farmers are sometimes styled "always complaining," and "irritable." Where their very all is so frequently in jeopardy they cannot help feeling suspense and concern for its safety.

So when the corn had stood in the shocks four or five days, the horses were coupled to the waggons, and there was a general exodus to the field. First of all Launcelot had plucked some ears from the sheaves, and rubbed the corns out in his hand, winnowing them with his breath, and trying them in his mouth to see that they were hard and dry enough. Jemmy Boulton and old Betsy, with several of the girls, rode in the first waggon, others came along behind. Scamp and Grubby rode on the horses' backs "side-saddle," or on the shafts, ready to jump down and open the gates on the way. Several pitchforks were in each waggon, and the females brought rakes, to rake up the loose straws scattered about. Generally they had an ell-rake; this required two to draw it; it was hard work to use it in the stubble, because the teeth hitched in the bindweed and other plants. Food

was taken out as well—Jemmy's in the broad flag basket, the others' in little hand-bags—and big jars of ale for the men; there was never any stint of this in the cornfield; for, however generous the farmer may be in hay-time, he always excels himself in harvest. "How much beer do you thenk you chaps drunk yesterday, Willum?" the master said to "dad" Eldridge one day. "Aw, I dwun know sir," Willum answered, "a smartish drap, I warn." "You emptied a thirty-sixer; and I be jest a gwain to tap another for ee to-day, look." There were quite three dozen hands, men and women together, employed on dad's farm at Woolstone, but even then it was a huge amount to get through in a day.

Arrived in the field, the waggons were soon piled up with rich golden corn bundles. The sheaves were pitched up, two and three at a time; the loader seized them, one in each hand, and threw them in their places; he had no trouble in getting them to remain in their position. The youngster shouted "hold tight," and led the team between the shocks; the load was completed in a very short time. To enable the loader to descend from the pile, the pitchers thrust their forks hard into the butts of the sheaves high up, the other leant an hand on each, and slid gently down to the ground. Jemmy's face was redder than ever, and the others' as well; he continued laughing and talking all the while; he entered heart and soul into the harvest. Old Betsy and the girls, very hot and sunburnt, drew their rakes to and fro, and brought the proceeds to Jemmy; he tossed it up

on the load, and went on whacking the sheaves up again like a giant.

Down at the farm the work proceeded busily, too. First of all the big barn had been crammed full from roof to floor, with a way through left for the thresher, then the ricks were built outside; several of these were often completed in one day. Barley was not bound at all, but gathered in loose; this took longer to handle consequently. If the weather was at all unsettled the thatch was immediately clapped on. Generally, after that, the outside of the rick was sheared all round to make it spick and span, though this is considered labour in vain nowadays, and is seldom performed. If the weather was bright and fine the whole harvest was complete in a fortnight, or a very little longer; then heigh-ho! for the harvest-home in the brew-house again; there was great joy and satisfaction at the safe and final ingathering of the corn crops. Last year, 1911, was a record time for harvesting. Some farmers on the hills had cut, carried, and threshed out by July 27; and even in the valley here, some of those with considerable corn-land had finished by the end of the first week in August.

As to the harvest-home, you may easily imagine what a congenial gathering was there; the round, cheery faces, the broad smile, the merry peals of laughter from the maidens, the fogger's ready wit, and old Jemmy's prolonged chuckle. A tremendous fire of logs had been blazing on the wide hearth all the afternoon and evening. The boiler outside had been steaming away, too. The fat hams and beef

had been cooking for hours. There was an abundance of vegetables of every kind, and a monster "roly-poly" plum pudding to crown the board at the finish. The ale stood in great gallon cans; the men drank from large tin cups, the women from glasses. Old Launcelot puffed and blowed like a steam-engine, bringing in the dishes. Jemmy performed the carving, and slivered off the juicy ham and beef.

"Now then, yer, what bist thee gwain to hae, bacon or bif?"

"Aw, gi' I a bit o' that ther 'am, ull ee."

"Come an, then. Le's hae thi plate yer!" and off he cut the slices of meat, half an inch thick and more.

"Yer, 'old on. Shan't be able to mawv if ee gets that lot down," the other replied.

"If thee casn't aat that bit thee dossn't want nothin' at aal. I could polish off two or dree sich lots as that. Now, Grubby! jump about a bit, come! Go and get I the steel Betsy, ull ee? This yer knife dwun cut a bit. Lode a massy! my old ooman's cyarvin' tackle 'ood fetch it off twice as quick. What dost thee want, Smithy? Now, you wenches, clap 'em along yer. No backin' out on't mind; ya got to get it down zomhow." Here the steel is brought. Skeep, skawp! skeep, skawp! skeep, skawp! "Tha's better Betsy! Now we shan't be long." The potatoes and cabbage were piled up; a large brown loaf stood in the middle. No one thought to say grace; all fell to with a will. Jemmy sat at the end of the table with arms sprawled out, and leaned well over, his head almost touching the plate,

and shovelled it in, wiping his mouth and mopping his face from time to time with a large red handkerchief.

Time after time the plates were passed to and fro for helpings. "Tha's it, mi bwoys," Jemmy cried, "get it down ee; ther's any amount yet, and plenty moore wher this come vram." Grubby and Scamp were ready to burst. Betsy ate sparingly. The girls pretended to be shy, but could not escape. "Go an wi' tha. If thee dossn't aat that mossel thee shatent go whum to-night, I can tell tha." After the first course the ale was poured out. "Now, Betsy, drenk up!" Jemmy said. "I dwun want none," she answered. "Come an with tha, do," he persisted; "thee bistn't a teetotler." "I dwun want none, I tells tha, so ther," Betsy replied. "Aw daal tha, if thee dossn't, mun, I do. Yer goes," Jemmy responded, and swallowed the liquor in great style, and the others with him as well. The girls had milk and lemonade; there was no stint of anything at the harvest-home.

After everyone had had enough the tables were cleared and a concert indulged in. The young women came prepared to sing. The old brew-house rang with harmony; the log blazed at the chimney back; the firelight played along the black rafters overhead.

"Bistn't thee gwain to seng to us, Betsy?" Jemmy inquired, with a broad grin from ear to ear.

"Lar' bless tha, no," the old woman replied. "Thees knows I caan't seng, very well."

"What, not at 'arvest whum?" he continued.

"Thee get off wi' tha," Betsy answered; "my bwoy Tom 'ull seng for I."

So the evening was spent in wholesome fun and merriment. The girls sang of lovers and rivalries, several woeful ditties, in which the "dark beauty" won the erewhile "constant and true" swain. The forsaken one died of a broken heart, and was laid to rest.

> "And on her grave was a turtle-dove,
> To show the world that she died in love."

Scamp sang "The Miner's Dream of Home"; someone else followed with "The Soldier's Letter" and "The Harbour Lights," and Jemmy stood up with half-shut eyes, and, after some little hemming and hawing, provided the treat of the evening,

> "The zun was zettin' be'ind tha 'ills,
> Acrass yan starmy moor."

After repeating the chorus several times all together at the close of the piece, the entertainment ended with a "Hip 'ip 'ooray for Maaster, Missis, and our young Miss!" and the company divided, Jemmy frequently admonishing the carter-boys "Nat furget the marnin', mind," and "The 'osses be out in the whum ground." Outside, the moon was high up over Gardner's Garn; the owls hooted and screamed. The old church clock struck ten as we came away home down through the fields. That was the end of harvest-home, for that year at least.

CHAPTER VII

The old blacksmith—Josh Hughes—The school—School-children—Education—Predilections and opinions—The school group—Hedgerow food—Name-cutting—Leaving school—Separation of the children.

In the central part of the village, which was formerly very picturesque, with its old stone houses and gardens and magnificent walnut-trees—which were first of all demolished and the space filled with shrubs and firs, and then these again razed to the ground to make way for several of those drab and dingy modern brick and tile dwellings I have before spoken of—is a branch of the road. Here for many years was a little enclosure called the pound, which was used to confine lost or straying cattle, until such time as they were claimed by the owner and released. Here also stood the village smithy, where we children used to peep in to see the man at the forge and anvil, to listen to the roar of the bellows and the ring of the metal, and to watch the fiery, fizzing sparks swish out all round. Here toiled one George Fisher and his son of the same name, old George and young George, both men of great stature, tall, broad-shouldered, fat, heavy, and ponderous. The old man was a smith of repute; the younger was fonder of the knife and fork than hammer, tongs, and tools. It was seriously

said, I remember, he ate so heartily, that he had to be greased and rolled after dinner. While father and son were earning their daily bread at the forge with the sweat of their brow, the wife and mother—and a rare, good, old-fashioned soul, too, a kind, compassionate creature—went about with a basket of cow-heels and tripe. Old George lived to a good age and died suddenly; young George did not long survive him. The wife and mother has long been dead, too. The old shop has been pulled down—I can just remember assisting in the operation—so that smith, smithy, and all are gone; there is not a vestige of anything left to mark where the forge, bellows, and anvil stood. Whoever wants a horse shod or a repair made to any ironwork or machinery at this time must hasten off to the next village; the sound of the hammer on the ringing anvil is heard here no more.

At the corner where the road branches off is a curious sarsen-stone full of round holes, several inches deep, let in the bank, obviously for the purpose of preventing the wheels of vehicles from wearing away the mound there. This stone has more than once attracted attention, and, having regard to the name of the place, it has been suggested that it may have been the old mere-stone or mark-stone of Saxon times. I have thought that I, too, should like to feel justified in believing it to have an historical interest, but the fact of the matter is, my old grand-dad, Josh Hughes, a true old rustic gentleman, very unsophisticated, but hard-working and thrifty, brought that very stone from

a field on his small farm at Cat's Brain, and placed it there sixty years ago. Of course, it may be that, in spite of this, it was once a mark-stone of the ancient chapelry of Highworth, to which this village formerly belonged, for there is certainly an historical stone of the kind at Stanton Fitzwarren, and Cat's Brain field is just about where the boundary-line would pass along, and there are several roads at that point. But I confess that I have always felt more interest in the old man than the sarsen-stone, and I am sure you would do so, too, from what I have heard, if you had known him, for all the old folk say that he was a most interesting character. One amusing anecdote related of him is that on being seriously advised to put his money in the bank, for safety's sake, he took the cue and promptly scooped out a hollow place under the hedgerow, and concealed it forthwith. If that is not the artlessness and simplicity which is virtue itself, I should like to know what is.

The village school stands in a field near the road, a short way down. There the little mites of children toddle off each morning to acquire the rudiments of learning, such as is deemed necessary to equip them for the struggle with life and circumstance. A few of these are farmers' children; part of them belong to the mechanic or artisan class employed on the railway, or at the distant town, but the majority are the offspring of farm-labourers. Some of these dwell in the lanes, some in the fields near at hand, and some at the cottages on the far-away farms. These bring their dinner in little baskets or handkerchiefs,

and eat it sitting down under the hedgerows in summer, or in the lobbies or school-room in winter. Sometimes they exchange food with each other—children are fond of tasting each other's bread—or some child living near at hand may invite them to his or her house to eat the viands. When I was a small boy I delighted in exchanging my white bread for that cut from the brown cone wheat loaf of a companion, who lived at Owl's Roost Cottages. These children's fare is simple; bread and butter, or lard, jam, or treacle. Sometimes, when you are sitting down to dinner, a timid little rap may come at the door, and on opening it some little dot or other will bashfully ask you for a "dop o' wato." If you should happen to have a good large mug of lemonade or milk handy, and give him that to drink, holding it to his lips, you will be handsomely repaid with the smile of pleasure and satisfaction which beams on the youngster's physiognomy as he gulps it down, and afterwards requites you for it with a hearty "tenk-oo." After this you may be sure the visitor will come again, and bring others as well; but then they never dream of intrusion or imposition; there should be no end to hospitality in their eyes; they have not learned the limitations of life.

It is a pretty sight to meet the country children coming or going from school; there is so much that is exceedingly quaint and picturesque in them, and primitive, too. There is a great attraction in the town children as well; I very often meet them trooping down the streets, laughing and talking, and arm in arm, but I like to see the country children

better. The town children are more shrewd-looking, I admit, or very many of them; they are better dressed and groomed, even superior in appearance; the girls are decked out with ribbons and curls, brown stockings and boots, or black boots cleaned every morning, smart frock and pinafore, beads for the neck, head-dress up to date, gloves or mittens for the hands and fingers. In manner they are sometimes grave enough, but oftentimes light, gay, and jaunty. The boys simply match with the girls. Their clothes—I except the poorest—are of the urban cut, smart and stylish, their boots well shone, large white collar and tie, and cloth cap. In manner these are often self-conscious and proud; they look at you airily or impertinently, and have already learned the side-glance; they have imbibed the town habit completely. It will not be safe to accost many of them, though you do it never so kindly, for if you should —and I speak from experience—you may receive a sound snub for your pains, or be made the victim of downright rudeness and impudence, though a good many I know, especially of the poorest, are nicely disposed and very prettily spoken. Both girls and boys of the town class soon attain tall stature; they grow fast, and are, on the average, thin and slight, and long-legged. Their features are often ghastly white, and otherwise unhealthy looking, and it is astonishing how many you meet wearing spectacles.

The country troop are far different. Perhaps they are not as keen-looking altogether, but they are bright-looking, fresh and well-kept. Some of the little maids from the farm-buildings are very quaint

and old-fashioned, both in feature, general appearance, and behaviour. They put one in mind of the figures on the old willow-pattern china-ware. They are not pretty—that is, as is usually understood by prettiness, but by their simplicity of feature and demureness of expression they are exceedingly attractive. Here is no ornament of dressed curls or ribbons, beads, or fine head-wear, or frilled frock, or armlet, or dainty brown boots and stockings, gloves or mittens; the child's clothes are plain, simple, and unpretentious, just as you would expect to find it in the circumstances. The face is square, the nose shortish, eyes brown, hair straight, tied over the crown with a piece of old black velvet or braid, dress of drab cloth stuff, print pinafore, dark stockings, and stout, heavy, square nailed boots, blacked weekly. When it is fine they come unencumbered; if it looks stormy they half carry and half drag a little jacket of coarse material on one side of them. As they near you they lower the eyes and head a little, and partly turn it on one side to avoid your gaze, coyly or timidly, but when they have passed by they will be sure to steal a glance round to see if you are looking at them, and hurry along toward school. Several times, up the lane, they will turn round again to see if you are watching them; nervously if you are a stranger, sociably if you are not. Their parents are poor, and they reflect their comparative poverty; they have not been pampered and spoiled, one can see that; their very bareness and humility force you to sympathize with them. Their cheeks are rosy and firm, the eyes strong and

deep, the stature short and stunted, the whole physique hardy and natural, not drawn up like a hot-house plant, and spectacles are very rarely met with in the case of true farm-labourers' offspring.

The boys are of corresponding appearance. They, too, are short in stature—Nature always rears a sturdy, hardy plant—generally thick, robust, and well-set. Their hair is usually long and bristly—sticking up for fine weather, as they jokingly say—and home-cut. Their clothes are mostly threadbare, made out of father's left-off, more than likely, often with trousers reaching halfway down the legs, ridiculous to the critical eye of the town-folk. They wear a woollen scarf around the neck in winter, and nothing at all in summer. Their boots are heavy, thick, and cumbersome, and well nailed; such as come from the farms in the fields wear leather gaiters in the winter, and keep them on during the day. The boys will not be as timid and shy as the girls, or not all of them, though the little brothers Gilbert and Jesse were most sensitive in this respect; it was amusing to see their pretty bashfulness, and how they hung their heads and retired behind the other boys. But poor Jesse is dead now; in the summer a horse in the field kicked the little mite's brains clean out.

Some of the country boys are very rough and noisy, and ready for all kinds of mischief and sky-larking, but they are frank and open with it; they are never secret and malicious. Others are sober, and outwardly dull; I do not mean that dulness which is stupidity, but rather that which may denote

a retiring, yet keenly observant nature. A great many of these rustic born and bred lads prove to be very long-headed and resourceful, not brilliant with intellectual wit and cleverness, but endowed with a large portion of sound and practical common sense, which is of so much value in life. Their receptiveness and acquisitiveness are remarkable, and they will easily beat the town boys when they are brought into contact with them in their own sphere; they invariably make good workmen.

The education meted out to the children of the village is not nearly as varied and complex as that of the town schools; it is more simple and elementary every way, though even this is more chequered nowadays than it needs to be. But if the training and instruction is simpler than that of the towns, it is quite sufficient for country purposes, or any other either, in a general way. The chief thing to be developed in children is character, and not the intellectual merely. There is far too much pains spent in the endeavour to cultivate a brainy race, and not enough efforts made to develop the pure natural genius. Brains are becoming far too plentiful to be useful; when they can be shovelled up everywhere, it may be inferred that they are below the average quality. Too many brains agree not well with the body; they are the producers of physical cowards. Brains alone are weak and powerless, altogether too nice and too interrogative. Brains do not agree with work very well. Flesh and blood and muscle are active and vigorous things, but they are material. Brains are too exquisite and supersensitive, yet they

do not quicken true feeling, for that exists without their office. There are too many brains now, and not enough will. Brains never could, and never will equal courage. Brains now are taking the place of pure intelligence, which operates very well without them, and is much more closely akin to character. There have been a hundred times more great things accomplished by character than by mere brains. Brains are for professions and faculties, for the desk and laboratory; the world of work requires determination, patient will-power, physical strength, hardihood, endurance, and a minimum of interrogation. In a word, we want cheerful and ready doers, the unspoiled virgin character, simplicity; and that is just what we do not get when every effort is made to cram the child's mind up with a thousand and one brainy subjects.

I am chiefly thinking here of the town output, and I have had ample opportunities for studying that branch of the matter; it is a pleasure to think that in the villages there has not been so much tampering with and faking the natural part of the infant, though, as I have said, there are steps that way; the leaven of the towns is working out to the country districts, making one and all uniform and consimilar, or, at any rate, trying to. It is this cultivation of the false and superficial taste that is largely responsible for dissatisfaction with rustic conditions, and the rush that is made from the villages to manufacturing centres. While a few are crying out for a return to the natural state, modern education is doing its best, in a thousand ways, to hinder and prevent that ideal,

and to render it for all practical purposes remote or impossible.

Perhaps some will take exception to this, and ask what my system of education might possibly be, if I happen to have any fixed ideas on the matter. I do not claim to be any authority at all on such subjects as these, but I will nevertheless mention a few things which I should approve of and suggest in general elementary work, if I were in authority. First of all, I should most certainly limit arithmetic, beyond its simple and necessary stages, plain addition, subtraction, division, and multiplication. What on earth is the use of teaching our working boys and girls such things as logarithms, cubes, square roots, exchange, stocks and shares, and proportion, together with algebra, equations, and problems? It is pure waste of time, material, and effort. It is stupid and unnecessary. It is a totally barren and fruitless pursuit, a racking of the infantile brain for nothing. There is no need of it at the time, and, in 95 per cent. of the cases, there never will be any need either. It is never remembered, and it deserves not to be remembered; it ought never to be imposed indiscriminately on young children at all. Of course, if they were all going to be clerks and surveyors, or school-teachers, it might be useful then, but to those who have to get their living at actual work it is absolutely useless. I have questioned numerous lads and youths in the sheds as to what they retain of such matters, but in every case it is the same; they have no reason to remember it, and are heartily glad to have forgotten it. It is powerless to form

character, for that is little or not at all impressed by figures and subtle calculations. We do not think arithmetic, and we cannot speak it; it is never a part of our very life as language is; it is as futile and dry as fusty old bones.

Then there are such things as grammar, parsing, analysis, geometry, and science classes; these, too, might be curtailed to advantage, and something taught in their place more likely to arrest attention, and become fixed in the memory for future delight or use. Clothes that are never worn may be considered as useless, and knowledge that is never remembered is negative also. Neither is needed; the clothes need not have been made, nor the knowledge taught. The things to teach are the things that will remain in after-life, and provide profit and amusement; it is impolitic to subscribe too much to what is commonly called "the needs of the age"; that is where many people get considerably out of their reckoning, for the age is glutted with their wares already, and is in positive need of something altogether different, as a counterpoise to so much wearisome agitation and excitement. It is not that the child is over-educated, but rather that the instruction is not of the right kind.

It seems to me—to express my own opinion—that records of human life, of heroic deeds and actions, by land and sea, in war and peace, at home and abroad, knowledge of the world and its ways, knowledge of life, knowledge of Nature, knowledge of humanity, knowledge of ourselves, and of one another, are what we want. We want to learn action as well as

thought. We want to cultivate strong feelings, sensibilities, and sympathies, real, true, living matter, not skeleton forms of elaborate artificiality and make-believe. Accordingly, in the place of those subjects which I have mentioned, and which take up so much time in our schools, and wear out so much juvenile energy to no lasting good, or useful purpose, I would teach briefly the account of faithful great men of all ages and nationalities who have helped to make the world what it is, and to assist life, and I would teach it over and over again many times, till it was well grounded, and certain never to be effaced. In this collection there would be prophets and kings, poets and writers, soldiers, sailors, statesmen, pioneers, heroes of battle, heroes of labour, heroes of war and peace, heroes of old times and of new, of the eastern and western worlds, of the north and south, all those great ones who have ennobled life and left us a heritage of true fame and glory. Here you would have everything that really matters—history, religion, law, literature, deeds of courage and valour, virtue, every living precedent. You would have the whole fruit and riches of life in a small and convenient compass, such as must affect character; and you would have taught it through no sacrifice of other useful elementary matter, but only that which is proved over and over again to be utter extravagance and failure.

Then there are the lessons of Nature as well, of trees and flowers and sunny scenes. I would have beautiful illustrated books of wild plants and flowers in all schools, and the children should learn them by

name, and be induced to go and seek them in their native places, wherever possible; it would be time well spent, and would assist character as well. It is a purer, and sweeter, and healthier recreation than dancing, roller-skating, or football. Last of all, I would have the school-room walls hung with beautiful pictures of lovely rural and agricultural scenery, so that the children might always have something before their eyes cheerful, restful, inspiring, simple, and *national*. There should be scenes of seed-time and harvest, teams at plough, cattle and sheep feeding, the river and the mill, haymaking, the reapers and sheaves, heavily-laden orchards, farmyard buildings and ricks, threshing and other occupations of the country-side. The whole atmosphere should partake of sweet and beautiful simplicity, and harmonize with the intuition of the place. That is my idea of national education, such as would keep the mind and soul in unison with real life and Nature, and counter-check some of the deplorable and alarming tendencies of the times.

There are about eighty students at the school; counting infants and all together—the entire population of the village is no more than three hundred and seventy—these are managed and taught by a governess and two young assistants. I have told you already of their quaintness as individuals, if you should see them assembled in a body, this feature would be much more in evidence; they would strike you as being quite a unique little gathering, a very rustic and sequestered lot—Nature's own offspring. A short while ago someone showed me the photo-

graph of a group taken at the school a quarter of a century ago, and my own self in it, boys and girls together, teachers and all, and I could not help smiling at the figure we cut at that time, the very oddness of the whole picture; it all seemed inexpressibly funny. The long white pinafores of the girls, and patched sleeves and trousers of the boys; the round chubby faces and sturdy features; the mischievous smile, and downright irrepressible grin, this one hiding his face behind the other ready to explode with laughter; another looking so solemn and expressive; the modest and demure countenances of the girls; the consciousness of this one, the artlessness and stolidity of the other, the teachers at the rear with antiquated head-dress, and the parson on one side, presumably to overawe us with his superior presence—it was enough to raise a smile. Where they all are now I could not tell. Some are this way and some that; some dead, some living; some poor, others more fortunate; happy, beloved, successful, distressed, despised, and poverty-stricken. So much happens in a few years space; the world is new-peopled almost in a quarter of a century.

There is swinging in the playground for the maids, and a tumbler and bars for the boys. At the back of the school, towards the field, is a large shrubbery which abounds in blackbirds and thrushes. These sing loudly from the yews and laurels while the juveniles are at lessons, or in the play-time, and the cuckoo takes his position in the elm-tree in the season and utters his cry, so dear to and beloved of the school-children. Now and then he perches

on the playground wall and sings there, too; and I have known him to alight on the ground within the enclosure and sing as loudly as ever, "Cuck-oo, cuck-cuck-oo!"

The school-room walls were adorned with pictures, Scriptural all, and though we did not understand the whole of the subjects, from being always before our eyes, they made a deep and lasting impression. There were two which I especially remembered, from their being hung just opposite my form in the class-room: one of these was Abraham on his way to offer up his son Isaac, and the other was the fiery serpent lifted up in the wilderness to stop the plague. I can still see the youthful Isaac bearing the faggot on his back to kindle the altar, and the agonizing features of those gazing upon the serpent in the other.

The school was subject to visits from the vicar and the lady of the manor. These looked in when they were least expected, the former to correct and supervise certain points, and the latter to inspect the children, and note their appearance and behaviour. The best and tidiest girls and boys were rewarded with gifts of coins and complimentary remarks, the badly-behaved were made to feel that they were not in her favour. If the youngsters did not make their obeisance out of school, the lady visitor would very gravely address them and say: "Little boy, where are your manners?" the reply to which generally was: "Ain't a got none, miss." After this, the young hopeful shot off like an arrow, not knowing whether to be glad or sorry, fearing to be punished for his daring misdemeanour.

Country children discover a great many edible things in the hedges and fields, which are unknown to those who dwell in the towns; they can usually find something or other to munch at all times of the year. In the spring they eat the large buds and young leaves of the hawthorn, commonly known as "bread and cheese," which are quite palatable; later they devour primrose and cowslip petals and stems, the juicy leaves of the sorrel, which was a favourite salad among the Romans, the *lapathum*, as Horace tells us; afterwards they dig up the underground nuts and eat them, too, and often bite a crowfoot bulb by mistake, which is remarkably hot and pungent. Then, in the summer, there is the fruit of the maple-tree, "hatchets and bill-hooks," crabs and wilderns; and in the autumn blackberries, acorns, beech and hazel nuts. When these are gone there remain slans (or sloes), peggles (hawthorn fruit), hipsons (the wild-briar berries), and the rich berries of the yew. All these things are gathered and devoured by the youngsters of the country-side, to say nothing of raw wheat and barley, peas and beans, with turnips, swedes, and mangolds from the field.

I remember once eating some of the brilliant crimson berries of the arum, or cuckoo-pint—"snake's victuals," and "ladies and gentlemen," we called them—and severely burned my throat with them. I wept all the way home, and went to my kind old grandmother, who forthwith gave me some hot tea to drink out of a blue basin, which did not mend matters very much; I can still seem to feel the

scalding liquid going down my throat. Though I always exceedingly admire the berries now, and the finger-like stalk on which they grow—for they are most delicately ornamental and beautiful—I never attempt to break my fast with them; I have not forgotten the early experience.

All the leading boys of the school make efforts to immortalize themselves by engraving their name on the trunk of one of the high beech-trees that stand by the pool in the meadows. I have heard this practice referred to in scathing terms, and pronounced barbaric, but perhaps it is not quite as bad as that in the case of small boys; it is just as natural to them as apple-stealing and other juvenile tendencies. We have heard the dying soldier's farewell to his comrades in the song, in which, among other things, referring to the trees of his childhood, he says:

"With my knife I cut my name out on the bark."

It gave him much pleasure to remember that, dying there in the bloody carnage of the battle-field. If it is really a crime to carve one's initials on the trunk of a tree, then I am a most guilty culprit, for mine is there as conspicuous as any.

As soon as the children leave school they go to work, generally starting on the farm, perhaps with their father, helping him with the horses, or driving plough, or assisting with the cattle; for this they receive three shillings or so a week, and some portion of their food. The girls go out in situations as nurse or kitchen maid, and soon become initiated into the mysteries of pots and pans and household duties.

Their wages for this would be about sixpence or a shilling a week, with keep. By-and-by these see better situations, and drift farther away; some of the boys migrate to the towns; a good many of the girls are packed off to London or elsewhere, where wages are higher. Other children take their places at the school; there is a steady coming and going all the while; the number of students remains practically the same.

In dealing with the school and school-children I have said a little about my own days, but this I have done, not because they were any more interesting than those of the present time, but because I had a more intimate knowledge of them; but you may be sure, for all that, that whatever was done then is done now; all the old games are still indulged in. The boys kiss the girls and are cuffed in return; the children are whipped and kept in after hours; the teacher scolds and stamps her foot in passion; the students look ridiculously and smile defiantly, or quake with dreadful fear; there is laughing and crying, nodding and whispering, sweethearting and coquetting—all the old childish joys, griefs, passions, and feelings exhibited. However wise they may ultimately become, we cannot force the children to look at things through the eyes of sage experience; theirs is the time of glorious irresponsibility and carelessness; they are not to be measured by the standard of adult humanity. For my part, I love to see them and to be near them; I love them at work and at play, whether quaint and curious, well or ill cared for, plain, pretty, simple, or ornamental. The

only distinction I do make—if I must confess any degree of partiality at all—is in the case of the very poorest of the farm-children; for something or other, in spite of other considerations of judgment, brings the balance of interest down on their side. I think, in my heart of hearts, that I care for them most of all.

CHAPTER VIII

The village church—Boys in the tower—The bells—Types of worshippers—The sexton—"Old Tommy"—The chapel in the lane—The old local preacher.

THERE is a church in the meadow opposite, facing the school. On one side of it, and slightly to the rear, is a farm-house and buildings, most picturesquely set among shrubs and trees; an orchard adjoins the burial-ground on that part. To the left, farther away over the fields, studded with high elms, other buildings are visible, with thatched roofs. This is the Old Farm, formerly known as Cherry Orchard, now in dilapidation, and occupied by farm-labourers. Beyond that you look away over rich corn land, not open and wind-swept, but surrounded with hedges of hawthorn, sloe, elder, and hazel, toward Sevenhampton and Stall Pitts. The rich red soil of Rowborough field, the site of the Roman relics, is visible through the towering wych-elms to the right of you.

The church is solid in structure and large enough. It was never intended to be pretty and ornamental, but firm and substantial. The designers, whoever they were, considered strength to be of more importance than beauty. They built to endure; sturdiness

was their especial characteristic; there is strong masculinity expressed throughout the whole building. The place is ancient, or some parts of it, at least. The nave is Late Norman, about 1140—that is, about the time of the Second Crusade. Before this there must have been an earlier building, a chapel or something, where the early folk assembled, for it is inconceivable that the foundation of the present church should have been the origin of worship here. Not that the people were so deeply religious; having regard to the present, if there could be the smallest possible relation, I should say they were not. The majority of the men, no doubt, went to bed on the Sabbath, or lounged about the fields, or went "porching" in the woods and copses, or talked about the Turks and "furreners" at Jerusalem, or sat on the benches at the inn and drank ale out of the old-fashioned pots, clad in rough homespun smocks, or poked fun at the parson and his "sarmon" or homily. In the evening, since they could neither read nor write, after sitting awhile on the rude bench or stool, palms on knees, squinting and blinking, and receiving a severe, but well-merited castigation from the good-wife, they mounted up the ladder-like stairs to the land of Nod, to be ready for cock-crow the next morning.

All parts of the church are not contemporary; the building grew little by little, through addition. First was the nave, plain and bare; next was added the chancel — the villagers were growing spiritually ambitious; then, soaring higher and higher, they coveted a tower, and in their enthusiasm subscribed

the necessary means and set about building it. It is well they did so at the time, too, for if it had been left till now, it would never have been done at all, that is certain. There have been a transept and vestry added since, and the nave has been surmounted with a miniature steeple or pinnacle, which is a pity. It is too superficial to be much of an ornament, and it destroys the originally strong and austere outline of the whole; it is too characteristically modern altogether.

The tower is square and very massive; the walls are very thick, of three stories, and the whole is crowned with pinnacles and battlements. The roof is flat and well leaded over. There is a little square aperture by which you may reach this if you can climb up the wall inside. We boys found the roof very convenient for making observations, and especially at festival times, when we could creep in unnoticed. On the night of Queen Victoria's Jubilee we stayed there till twelve o'clock, viewing the bonfires on the hills and all around. Sometimes, however, groping our way up the pitch-dark stairs, we accidently came in contact with the rope of the "ting tang," and made that sound, and so discovered our whereabouts. Forthwith the old sexton, of eighty years, with Roman nose nearly touching his chin, grey-headed, and bushy grey brows, stooping and bent, with billy-cock hat, white smock, knobby stick, and heavy cloutering boots, came shuffling into the belfry and painfully up the steps, crying out in a shrill treble voice, sounding very far off: "What be you bwoys at up ther? Come along down.

Come down, I tell ee;" to which we one and all unceremoniously replied: "All right, gramp! You stop ther; we be comin'," and mounted up higher and higher. Irritated with our daring, the old man climbed up to the clock floor, repeating his demand for our return, and threatening to "fetch the reverent," until, out of sheer concern for him, we went down the steps again, this time giving the rope a vicious tug or two and making the bell ring loudly. The old man stood on one side at the base of the stairs and struck at us with his stick as we passed down; we laughed merrily at his discomfiture. It took him about ten minutes to hobble down the dark stone spiral stairs and reach the open air; we were already far away and out of sight.

There are three large bells in the top story of the tower, the heaviest of which weighs almost a ton. Then there is the middle one, on which the clock strikes, and "the little bell." The old wise-heads used to say that when the latter was made a lady stood by and shot a whole lapful of silver into the melting-pot. I do not understand enough about bell-making to know how the proportion works out in metals, but, though the casting has a fine rich tone, it is not what I should call silvery. The three together emit a rather monotonous sound of "Bim-bom-bell, Bim-bom-bell"; but, whether it is through custom and association, or a perverted taste in the musical, or want of appreciation, I must confess that I like the sound of them as well as I do of any. In the church over the fields they have four bells, the sound of which the children interpret by

expressing the words: "I'll tell John Brown," "I'll tell John Brown," and "Tommy Lincoln," "Tommy Lincoln;" and which the French poet Moreau expressed by the words: "Arrivez donc:" "Arrivez donc."

The bells of the village church are not rung very frequently. At Christmas time the ropes are pulled well, and on New Year's Eve, then again at Easter Sunday, and later on at Harvest Festival. All the rest of the year they are merely chimed, unless a wedding takes place. Then, if there is the possibility of a shilling or two, and a good deep draught of ale, the old tower is made to tremble for a short while, though not for long. The heavy bells want some swinging, and no one is willing to work for nothing nowadays, not even bell-ringers. Sometimes the heavy bell swings up too high, and lodges in an inverted position. In that case it must remain so till the mechanics arrive; there will be no more music from it that night.

Within the churchyard are several firs and a large yew-tree. When I was very young I thought it would be nice to be buried beneath such a shrub, but at this time I must confess that I should prefer an open position in the full sunlight, for the yew is a poisonous plant, and the little florets will not thrive beneath it. Searching around the moss-covered grave-stones we do not find any very quaint epitaphs, or long setting forth of imaginary virtues, which is to be noted; it is a further proof of the ingenuousness of the old inhabitants, though perhaps they did not really possess virtues, and that is the reason why

they are not chronicled on their monuments. Writing this, however, I call to mind there is a tablet inside containing a lengthy and glowing account of the charity and benevolence of one worthy gentleman, "now deceased," and setting forth his "exemplary conduct"; but he appears to have been well-to-do, and could afford to have his good parts perpetuated. The grave of Daniel Lewis, the old dissenting parson, who was as gentle as a lamb, and a pattern of kindness and humility, is out of sight with the crowd, and forgotten. There are many simple great ones, fully deserving of a monument, buried deep beneath those grassy mounds.

The interior of the church is spruce and trim, all modern, new, and well kept. There are few interesting relics to claim the attention of the visitor: these were swept away at the restoration; there is scarcely anything to kindle the imagination. The ticking of the clock in the tower above you seems only to give a greater intensity to the silence which otherwise prevails, and has a peculiarly depressing effect on the nervous mind; it is a relief to escape from it into the open air. Once outside, the eyes rest upon green pastures, large elms and sycamores, and the mortal spirit is soothed and pacified. There is a creepiness comes over you standing in the belfry, beneath the high window, and especially when you open the old door to ascend the stone steps in the darkness, a strange sense of awe and fear takes possession of you for the time being, in spite of yourself. You feel in that darkness to be in the company of the spirits of those long dead, as if

expecting every moment to be tightly gripped by skinny arms and fingers; the whole atmosphere is that of weird solemnity.

It is interesting to enter the church early, and see the worshippers come in, the old men first, afterwards the youths and maidens, and finally the children. Robert Brooks was a regular attendant at morning service, though over eighty-five; he is in the workhouse now. His grey beard and shaking head, as he walked feebly up the nave, were pathetic to see; his was a striking figure. Next came William Maisey, hard on four score. He wore heavy nailed boots, and gaiters of corduroy, with both hands held down by his sides. His old head was frosty white, and his short beard the same; his nose was prominent, his eyes kindly, his whole expression exceedingly pleasant. His heavy boots sounded loud on the paved floor; he cloutered along noisily, but he was welcome; everyone had a smile and a kind word for old William; and one young married woman took such a fancy to him that she went up to him and kissed him outright.

The village maidens are delightful to see. There is a town and a country beauty; the former is cultivated and derived, the latter is natural born, as artless and fresh and lovable as the wild roses that bloom about the fields in early summer. For beauty consists not more in unspeakable feature than in unspeakable complexion; indeed, without complexion, where would beauty be? What loveliness would the rose possess without those delicate tints of white and cream, pink and red? Would you be as

rapturous over the mere form, the curled or folded petals, though the shape were never so exquisite? But the exquisiteness of shade and colour surpasses everything beside; the very perfume is subordinate to these. So colour, combined with matchless form, is the supreme mark of beauty, and good health produces both these; where, then, should we find perfection if not in the villages, in the sweet, pure air, and lovely surroundings of trees, and flowers, and sunshine? I have gone miles and miles through the crowded metropolis, through the streets and parks, by train, bus, tube, and otherwise, always searching for beauty; beauty here and beauty there, and beauty everywhere; but it was seldom or never to be found. Fine features you meet with, and figures too, but the eyes are not bright, the lips are not red, the cheeks are thin and sallow, and soiled with the soot and grime, the smoke and dust, the hurry and restlessness, the artificiality of city life. Roundness and smoothness are a chief part of beauty, too, a fulness of form and countenance, almost plumpness, as the rosy swelling apples on the bough, the ripe, bursting grapes, sleek, juicy plums and peaches. The town paragons lack this grace, this richness of form and figure; they are too spare, too thin-shouldered, lean, slight, gaunt even; they seem to me to want the very rudiments of true beauty.

The dress of the country maidens, too, where they have not been too much influenced by the town styles, is simpler, more tasteful and suitable, more becoming and natural. There is little pretence to elaborate finery. In the summer you see whites and

creams, in the winter warm reds and blues. In the sunny days the cool thin muslin and large-brimmed straw hat, *simplex munditiis* ("plain in its neatness"), as Horace styles it; in the shadows, a pretty red jacket and delightful little round cap of the same colour, enclosing a face fresh as an apple, robust, and yet delicate, a perfect picture of health and beauty. All eyes are fixed on the maidens as they enter the church; old and young alike gaze at them, for beauty compels everything, "draws us with a single hair," as Pope says; beside, as you know, Hebe, who is youth personified, is one of the Immortals; she is bound to be worshipped. There is another quality which agrees so well with beauty in the village maidens, that is, demureness; they are not self-conscious. This is bred of rusticity, of simple life and conversation, of innocency, and is the most lovable feature of all, though it is rarer now than it used to be.

The little boys and girls march in all together, the boys cap in hand, cloutering along with heavy boots, panting and sweating very often, for they have been playing in the field, likely enough, and are very nearly exhausted. The girls walk quietly round to the transept, leading little Jacky or Tommy by the hand, who turns his head over his shoulder and looks behind him all the way with wide open eyes, astonished to see so many people together. The poor mother enters with her little swarm, and places them all along in the seat beside her, and hands them books, as many as can tell the words and letters.

The sermon in the village church is often long, and the minister severe. Knowing all his flock so nearly and well, he is pretty much acquainted with their several weaknesses and shortcomings; and when anything of note transpires—if this one is guilty of some little fault or indiscretion, or that one has been "having it over" with his neighbour, or has been absent from his pew for a long time, and so on—some kind of reference to it will most certainly be made; everyone in the building regards the allusion, and recognizes the person for whom it is intended. There is a good deal of nudging in the pews. "Zumbody bin gi-in ee tha wheeze, missis," the old farmer declares to his wife, after church.

I have spoken of the originality and independence of some of the villagers. That has been illustrated in church, even during service, and in my own recollection. Old Launcelot Whitfield, of Burton Grove, liked church well enough, but he could not bear the intoning of the responses, and the chants generally; he could never understand what purpose it served, nor what it was done for; nevertheless, he put up with it as well as he was able. But one Sunday morning—perhaps he came there in an ill humour—he took the chants much more seriously to heart, and when the parson sang "Lord, have mercy upon us," he jumped up from his seat roughly and bawled out, "Yer, gi' us my 'at, and le's get out o' this. I've had enough o' this. I can't stand it no longer;" and marched out of the building, frightening the ladies, and shocking the vicar and his wife. Launcelot's face was fiery red, his mouth firm, and

his old eyes glittered; yet for all that impatience of his, he had an honest and manly heart. One old farmer would not go to church any more because the parson prayed for the soldiers at the war, and mentioned their names individually.

The old sexton was accredited with many quaint sayings and eccentricities. It is said that he suffered from rather astonishing lapses of memory, and was a little too much addicted to the habit of sleeping at his post as well. He lived before my own day, though, and I cannot vouch for the truth of all that is said of him. But that he slept soundly in church, and woke up suddenly, thinking himself to be in far-away scenes, and sometimes uttered rather irreverent exclamations, is beyond all disputing. One morning, for certain, he slept very soundly, all through the sermon and after, and was only awakened by the noise of the people trooping out of church. Then, suddenly starting up, dazed and bewildered for the moment, and rubbing his eyes, he exclaimed loudly: "D——n it all, is it awver, then? Lard a massy ow!"

His son Billy, who succeeded him in the office, continued his sire's characteristic, though he was not quite as slumberous. He was an old man when I was a boy, of small stature, very much bent, with hooked nose, and pointed chin; he walked with a stout stick. He was known to the youngsters, all and sundry, as "Bagger nation." Whenever he saw any of the juvenile clan in the churchyard, he always hobbled after them with his stick, and shouted: "Bagger nation sakes the bwoys, come

along out." Billy's chief glory was in funerals. One thing, they provided him with work. There was so much for digging the grave, so much for tolling the bell, and, beside this, he had to officiate and help the priest. I can still see him casting in the mould as the parson read the words: "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." After the ceremony was over the boys used to help him fill the grave, and perform other small offices; I have more than once helped to tread the earth down upon the unhappy corpse to earn an honest penny, which was the remuneration for that toil. Once when there had been several deaths in the village in quick succession, a farm-hand said: "Main vew vawk dyin' about lately, Willum." "Eece 'tis; nice vew a know," Willum replied. Then under a happy inspiration he added: "Must all go, zum time or nother, a know, and chent one in a 'underd as lives longern that."

After Billy's death the office devolved upon "old Tommy." He is extremely deaf, you may know to what extent by this fact alone, he never hears the bells, though they are just up above his head. At a funeral the other day I was standing near him, waiting for the cortège; he was tolling the big bell. His face wore the utmost gravity; for my part, watching him there, I could not help but smile. Tommy gave a vigorous short tug at the rope; "bom" went the bell; the vibration almost lifted you off your feet. He walked out of the belfry door and looked out for the hearse; in a moment he came back and gave the customary tug again. Then he

turned to me, and said in a husky voice, "Towls well?" I smiled and nodded. "Can't yern, ya know," Tommy continued, and tug, tug again. He guessed the time required for the sound to die away before repeating the operation.

Tommy is a slight-built man, not very tall, grey-headed, and with a small straggling bit of beard. His face is wrinkled and weather-beaten, for his life has been spent wholly out of doors in the fields, and with the cattle. His voice is always very hoarse, and in addressing you he leans his head towards you, and speaks very loudly, in a raucous and almost uncanny tone. You can always tell when he is near by his loudly-uttered words, though no doubt he thinks he is speaking in a most subdued manner. His hair is rough and curly. On Sundays he wears a high linen collar, the corners of which stick out in something of the Gladstonian manner, and which gives him an old-time appearance. His coat is of the swallow-tail order, of black cloth, and trousers of the same. His small head is crowned with the bolero. In the winter afternoons and evenings he is to be seen with old-fashioned horn lantern in one hand, and a bundle of large keys in the other. He visits the church at all times of the day and night; he is not a bit nervous. Besides being sexton, he sees to the lighting of the lamps all round, and in the porches, too, as well as to the fires for heating. Very often in bright moonlight nights these show conspicuously; when it is pitch dark they are out, too. Everyone then passes humorous remarks about the lamps, and cries aloud for Tommy. It is either the

wicks or the oil at fault, or the wind has blown them out, or something else, but there is no complaining.

Tommy is intensely proud of his graves, and regards them all with fatherly care and affection. Sometimes he is deputed to renovate a mound, and keep it in order permanently. Then, whenever you meet him, he is certain to be full of the matter; all he can talk about is the clipping and paring and tidying up of the turfs. Notwithstanding his great deafness, if you should happen to ask the old man if he would like a drop of whisky, though your voice be ever so moderate, he hears well enough then. "Jest a leetle drap," he says.

Tommy had to attend an inquest one day as witness, concerning an unfortunate son who died suddenly. Of course, he understood nothing at all, and could not be made to do so either. The coroner was furious; he was raging mad almost. Poor Tommy was an object of extreme pity. As soon as the coroner handed him the Testament to take the oath, he began rummaging forth the spectacles and opening the pages; he thought he had to read a chapter. Several times the coroner tried to make him understand; then the storm broke. He shouted, raved, roared, and bullied the old man most shamefully; he was livid with passion, but Tommy was unperturbed. He kept giving his unsolicited evidence with child-like simplicity. "Listen to me!" the coroner shouted, with his mouth in the old man's ear. "LISTEN TO ME! LIS-TEN—TO—ME!" You could hear him fifty yards away outside. Then, in a fit of desperation, he concluded: "Take him away! TAKE HIM

AWAY! TAKE—HIM—AWAY!" So the old man was led outside, and the testy coroner proceeded with his business. There was not much of the milk of human kindness in him, at all events.

Just down the lane, a short way from the church, is a tiny dissenting chapel. It is no bigger than a poor man's dwelling, and is almost out of sight, hemmed in with apple-trees on one side and a quaint thatched cottage on the other. I have known the time when quite a crowd frequented the place, but it is almost deserted now. The percentage of worshippers in villages, as in towns, is on the wane; there is a tragic falling off in numbers at church and chapel, too. Pausing without the door the other evening, and chancing to peer inside, I saw there were but three occupants, the preacher, his wife, and one poor old woman beside, and she has died since.

But there have been rousing scenes in the chapel in times gone by. Then conversions were a common occurrence. There were mid-week services and open-air meetings. Pressing invitations were sent round to the poor folk, and a good attendance was the inevitable result. Preachers came from all the villages and towns in the neighbourhood; there was great and endless variety of sermons and doctrine. William Keen was the superintendent then. He was a stout champion of Nonconformity, and a stalwart progressive politician as well. His work lay in the manufactory at the railway town. All day or night he slaved in the rolling-mills amongst the blazing white-hot iron, and walked to

and from the village. This he did for nearly fifty years, and after that procured an old tricycle, as heavy as a wagon almost, and trundled that along. His hair and side-whiskers were grey, and his face very red; it was said he was fond of a glass, but what of that? His work was abnormally hot and exacting, and whatever he took, he earned it. I have no patience at all to listen to those who would damn a man for taking a glass of beer, whether he be Christian, Turk, or Infidel.

There was no music at all at the chapel in those days. William Keen started the singing, and the others joined in, young and old together; it was a very homely crowd at all times. Grandfather Bridges was there, and his wife Letitia, both very devout indeed. One old lady declared she felt so light she could jump over the housetop; and another worshipper's frequent and fervent expression was that they would sweep the enemy away "with the beesom of destruction." He also hoped the Almighty would amend the ways of the Anglicans, or otherwise "bring them all pell-mell into a whip (heap) o' stwuns."

I remember one old local preacher, named Maslin, who used to come to the chapel now and then, clad in a white smock reaching halfway below the knees. This old fellow was an agricultural labourer, and lived far away over the downs. He was very short in stature, with grey hair, and exceedingly bronzed and sunburnt; he had toiled among the sheep and lambs, the wheat and oats, and had heard the lark sing in the blue heavens thousands of times. He had also

felt the cold nipping wind sweeping up the valley and over the hill-tops, and had trudged through the deep snow to the village over and over again. When he came to preach he carried his dinner tied up in a red handkerchief and hung on a blackthorn stick over his shoulder. His fare was very simple—bread and cheese, and he must have a glass of ale with it from somewhere or other; he did not indulge in hot cooked food that day. A great number used to go and hear him preach; he could always command a congregation, he was so sternly simple, outspoken, and comical. He was a firm believer in the devil as a personality. Once when he had been called to see a sick man, and had not been able to make a very deep impression on the unfortunate, he attributed it all to the actual presence of the Evil One. "I know'd 'a was ther," the old man declared most gravely, "for I could smell the brimstone; the house was full on't."

But what I have to tell you is more seriously comical than all this, and it is gospel truth. One Sunday evening, in late autumn, he was down to preach, and there was the usual full attendance; the little chapel was packed; a great time was expected; they were not all disappointed. Old Maslin was beside himself, and preached vehemently. As the sermon proceeded—it was half sermon and half prayer—he waxed hotter and hotter. Now he leaned far forward over the rails of the pulpit, now jumped backward, stamped hard with his feet, and swayed from side to side. The congregation perspired, and trembled in their pews. Louder and

louder the old fellow's voice pealed out; he stamped harder and harder; everyone felt something was to happen, and happen it did. There was a large iron stove in that chapel; it stood in the centre. The pipes from this went up and then passed horizontally to the wall some distance away. Moreover, they had not been swept out for a long time, and were become very foul. The storm raged with increasing fury. The old folk were getting uncomfortable; the young girls tittered. The preacher shouted at the top of his voice, and stamped mightily with his feet. "Send the power, and send it now!" he cried. One more moment, and it came. The joints of the pipes could stand no longer. With a shuddering crack the whole lot of the horizontals toppled down. A loud yell went up from the people; the youth exploded; but there were no heads broken. There was a prompt young man sitting just underneath that pipe. At the first crack he leapt up and caught it falling; but he made a sinister use of the opportunity. Receiving the pipes in the middle, with a dexterous movement of the hands, he twirled them round, and shot vast clouds of soot over all the people from one end of the place to the other. The result may be better imagined than described; it was like a pandemonium. All Maslin's preaching faded beside that night; that was his veritable *coup d'éclat.* The old man has been dead this quarter of a century.

CHAPTER IX

"Jacky" Bridges' cottage—The old road-mender—Kemble and Ryder—Bill Brittin—"Maas" Tull—Granny Bowles—The village shoemaker—Farmer Ody—Tramps.

I HAVE spoken of Jacky Bridges, or Dart, the road-mender. He lives in the little old original cottage at the corner of the lane as you turn to go up to Nightingale Farm, beyond the Roman ruins. The tenement is his own, and was his father's before him. It was really a kind of squatter's cottage. Someone or other, not very ambitious, came along, admired the spot, obtained material, built his house, and settled in it, there and then. That was before the hundred and one laws and regulations had been passed relating to roads and highways, waste land and borders in the villages. With the advent of "order" all this has been changed. In many cases owners of adjoining property claimed the little tenements and plots, which was easy enough from a purely legal point of view, since there could be no writings or titles to the small holding; or, at the first opportunity, someone tempted the occupier to sell, and then demolished it; or these pseudo-democratic institutions, County, Urban, and District Councils, stepped in and declared such houses to be

a nuisance, and razed them to the ground, or condemned them on the score of health. Whatever it be, the end was the same—that was the extinction of these small cottages everywhere by some means or other.

Even if you have a strip of land in undisputed possession near the highway in the village, the regulations are so strict and severe that you will not be permitted to construct yourself a dwelling upon it; there will be a host of objections raised on every conceivable account; you dare not challenge the power, or obstruct the mighty machinery of the infinitesimal parish or rural council. As for the condemnation, *en bloc*, of houses in the villages because they are small "and therefore unhealthy," that is often carried to the highest pitch of ridiculousness. If these cottages were so fatally unwholesome and unhealthy, it is marvellous that the old folk should have lived to such a great age in them, and reared up families of strong and vigorous children. In towns and congested districts and areas this is evidently pernicious, but the case is somewhat different away out in the country, where the houses are detached and isolated. There the surrounding is purity itself. The fresh sweet air, the scents of Nature, and white sunshine envelop all; in an ordinary state of cleanliness disease cannot exist there; and even uncleanliness in the individual case is counterbalanced by situation. Health blows in every breath of the wind, and is borne by every ray of sunshine. It enters down the chimney, by the chinks of the window, under the shrunken boards of

the door, and through the keyhole; try how you will you cannot bar its admittance.

The poverty, or very often apparent poverty, of the countryside cottage stands out in greater relief, and is more readily observed by "charitable" persons and intermeddlers than is that of urban districts; by setting about to remedy it in the spirit of "I will force you to accept of my help, whether you will or not," folk generally do ten times more harm than good, and, instead of curing the evil, may aggravate it, for that was not in the condition, but in the person. If you wrench an old man, "according to law," from his poor cottage, to which he is bound by the most indissoluble ties of association, love, and almost religious sentiment, and force him to live in a bigger house—very likely it is the workhouse—where he is infinitely wretched and miserable, whom have you benefitted? You have merely served the law. And what of the man? The law was made for the man, and not the man for the law. No one would be so foolish as to attempt to defend an unwholesome condition of living, but, I beseech you, do be on your guard against injury and hypocrisy, for the law and its administrators are full of both. If you want to find dirt, and filth, and squalor, and nakedness, and destitution, and starvation, and rags, and smut, and disease, and suffering, and misery, for Heaven's sake, look under your very noses, about the backyards and alleys of your own cities and towns, and do not come pestering us with official prying and inquisition! If you have anything to do for our good and welfare, do it; if you wish to give us anything,

give it, by all means, we shall be grateful for it, if it is worth having. But you do not intend to do either the one thing or the other; it is all sham, and falsehood, and mockery. The fact is, you are too full of thoughts of your own interest and advantage to care anything for us. One would think, to read the endless books and newspaper articles on matters and subjects relating to "industries" and "peoples," that there was nothing of these in existence outside the towns. Parliaments are elected for the towns; laws are passed for the towns; armies and navies are raised and built to protect the towns; wages, rights, privileges, arts and crafts, and everything else, are for the same. The dweller in the country—the humble agriculturist, the most honourable and most necessary of all workers, the alpha and omega, the beginning, end, and middle, the very backbone and support of every industry and all society, is forgotten, spurned, despised, and ridiculed. But the sun shines bright in the country; the birds sing, the flowers bloom, the trees cast their shadow, the wind breathes gently or pipes shrilly; here is simplicity, joy, and content, with no lust for more. In the towns are fever and fret, galled hearts and feelings, ceaseless agitation, classes and sects, furnaces and wheels, pushing and shoving, trampling under foot, very hell upon earth. Bravo for old Dudley Sansum and Jemmy Boulton, and the others who never knew the contagion! Freedom from it is like the primal state in the Garden of Eden, before Adam and Eve plucked the forbidden fruit. As soon as you change the country for the town you discover that you are

stark naked, you have lost innocency, you will never be happy any more; and if you should be so, you ought not to be, for that is being ungenerous and unnatural.

The little cottage is of one story, and contains three fair-sized rooms—one for living, and two for sleeping. The roof is of thatch. There is a fireplace at each extremity. The pantry is a small "lean-to" at one end, without the house. The original front was of rubble, but it has been modernized; brick has been substituted. A short while ago a part of the front was nearly falling down, but after the old man got the Old Age pension, he was able to get a few bricks and have the repairs executed. "Times be lookin' up, a know," the road-mender said; "must do summat to't now." The back wall of the house is built close against the bank, that is almost level with the eaves. Large elm-trees grow in the hedge there, and wave their tops high up. There, in the season, sing the thrush, the blackbird, the linnet, and the cuckoo. When the tempest howls through the elms and shakes the tops of more pretentious dwellings and mansions, it leaves the little thatched cottage unmoved; it is too humble for envy, even for that of the winds; they rage and fly along high above it. A small strip of garden is attached, protected by a box-hedge, and running down the lane. The line of elms continues down the bank.

Jacky's father lived here before him. He worked on the highways too. When the old people died, the son took up his residence under the paternal roof, and here his family of four—two boys and two

girls—were born. These are all grown up, and scattered to the four winds almost, and one is dead. He committed suicide. Entering the army, he served through the South African War in the cavalry; but as is so often the case, he contracted habits of dissoluteness, from which he could never free himself afterwards. At last, out of work, disheartened and penniless, baffled by fate and fortune, and overtaken at length by that worst of all weaknesses, he gave way to the impulse of self-destruction, and so ended his life. Happening to be near the railway one afternoon, and seeing an express coming towards him, he ran down the steep bank, clapped his hands together as a swimmer would do in taking the water, and dived straight under the wheels of the engine. The old man, living alone—his wife had been many years dead—was stunned with the news, and overwhelmed with sorrow. The old villagers shook their heads. "Ah! he come to a bad end. Know'd a ood. That sowjerin done summat for ee." His name is there, carved on the bark of the beeches that stand by the pool. Life is full of perils and pitfalls. We little dream, in days of childhood, what the future holds in store for us. If we knew, indeed, how many would face the ordeal?

The old road-mender is nearly eighty now. He is very small in stature, but just over four feet high. His features are small and regular; he is fine-looking—well-shaped nose, taper forehead, blue eyes, grey hair, moustache, and side whiskers. His shoulders are bent a little—they have borne many a heavy sack of corn from the thresher to the granary—and he is half a

cripple. His left leg is in the shape of a bow ; in walking he swings this round somewhat, and especially if he has imbibed a glass or two of fourpenny ; then he will have great difficulty in maintaining a dignified gait as he totters off, stick in hand, and basket on arm, down the road to his cottage. The old man is his own master, servant, and everything combined. He lights his fires, prepares his food, washes up and cleans the house, makes his own bed—is cook, chamber-maid, and scullery-maid together. Often in the summer months he rises at four, and lights the fire to cook the sweet green peas and young " taters." After that he potters about till seven or eight, then goes to view his vegetable crops in the allotment ; he has acquired great local fame as an horticulturist, and he usually tops the list for fine produce in the garden. After due inspection of the onion-bed and potato-patch, and comparing them with others in the field, he may visit the inn for a morning glass and a chat with the landlord ; then, if it is fine, he lies down in the shade of the withy-tree, or elder-boughs, till dinner-time, and very often all day, then loads himself with produce, and goes home to his cottage again. Here he cooks for tea or supper, eats the meal in silence, and retires about eight. The great problems of the day and hour do not disturb his manner of living ; in spite of his losses and misfortunes he is happy and satisfied.

Grandfather Bridges, the old market-gardener, who is eighty-six, is brother to him, and cuts about like a young fellow of forty. " Bless you, mister," he says, " I eats well, and drenks well, and enjoys life

as well as ever I did; the only difference is, I gets tired a leetle quicker, you know." Every morning he rises early, lights the fire, takes his wife Elizabeth up a cup of tea, and has breakfast ready by the time she arrives downstairs. His patriarchal face and beard do not seem to have changed this thirty years; but one day Nature will have finished her course with him, his little flickering flame of life will go out like a candle.

"Master" Kemble is everybody's man, and the old road-mender's in particular. He does work for everyone in the place almost, but is chiefly at home as a drover. He is the one homeless person of the village. All make use of him, but none own him. He does a job here and a job there; takes cattle to market and sells them, and brings back the cash; deals in faggots and firewood, sticking-wood for peas and clothes-props, watercresses and mushrooms—anything to get an honest copper. He is very rough in appearance, as drovers often are; yet he is a farmer's son. His father got into low water, and when the old people died, several of the boys fell away, and would not be bound to a master. This is common in the agricultural fraternity: they are proud in misfortune, and will not forget their former circumstances; they will often remain bare and destitute rather than cringe to another. Whether such a course is compatible with wisdom or not—as the world knows it—is questionable. At any rate, it is characteristic, and many will admire it. Horace's *mane difficilis* ("continue obdurate") is an excellent motto; would that more had it in them to cultivate the virtue!

Kemble serves all, quarrels with all, and is reconciled with all in turns; for, though poor, he is independent, and will not be put upon. He is frequently told to "get out of here, and never set foot on my premises any more;" but in a few days he turns up again, and solicits food, or a drink of ale or cider, and is not refused. Perhaps he presents himself at the kitchen door, wet and cold, and half famished, but cheerful as May, and begs for his breakfast; no matter what the offence has been, the farmer takes compassion on him, and serves the meal. For dinner he visits someone else, and another for supper, or he may share the road-mender's hospitality, and afterwards help him with his garden. His bedroom is chiefly the open air, his canopy the heavens, his candle the stars. He is often warned as to the perils of the course of life he leads, but he laughs at all advice, however sincerely proffered. "I be all right, naybur, dun you fret. Lode bless tha, I be as 'appy as all the birds in the ayr." "Ah! thee remember old Ryder, and what he come to; and take an' get tha a constant place, an' a bed to lay on," the other replies; but he might as well speak to the air for all the attention Kemble gives him.

Ryder was a castaway, too, an odd man of the village; a poor, simple fellow, as harmless as a lamb to all but himself, whose failing was merely a fondness for a glass of beer. His old father was shepherd at Rove's Farm; he had brothers and sisters well-to-do. When they shifted he could not be torn from the locality; he had a real love for the old scenes and faces. Part of the year he spent in training with the

county militia; at other periods he went haymaking and harvesting, and doing odd work. It is even useful to have such a man about the village; he is sure to be wanted from time to time. As to his military career, he came to be sergeant there. In the hay or harvest field he was always "shoulder arms," "right about face," and so on, and wanted to drill every youth he came in contact with. He slept under the haystack, or among the sheaves, or in a shed somewhere or other. But when the years crept upon him he found the life beset with hardships; poor, destitute, failing in health, an outcast, no one wanted Ryder any more. One morning—there had been a sharp frost—he was found on the towpath under the hedge, dead; his face was upturned, his clothes were frozen very stiff. He had not been well, but was seen about the night before. It was thought he was faint with weakness, and fell into the water, but got out and dragged himself under the hedge, and died from exposure. Perhaps no one mourned for him, but that is the fate of many poor.

Bill Brittin was as hard as flints. He lived in Pigeon House Cottage, and had relatives in London, whom he sometimes visited. When he went there he wore a corduroy suit, coloured kerchief round the neck, billy-cock hat, and heavy boots, with ground-ash stick in his hand. He carried a turnip watch, with silver chain dangling down. A good many of the cockneys stared hard at him, nodded and smiled, and many addressed him, very often to their sorrow. "Morning, John," this one said. "Is that you, John?" "Come again, John?" "How do you

do, John?" and so on. This one hailed him as an old companion, another tried to show him something; many dodges were tried to befool the old rustic, but not for Brittin. "You 'old on, mate," "No you dwunt, mate," "No thenk ee, mate," he replied to everything; and often his answers were too forcible to be repeated. "Does your watch go, John?" this one inquires. "Go? aa coorse a do, ya vool! goes when I carrs un," Brittin replies; he was not to be caught napping. His favourite stopping-place was the Load of Hay, at Paddington. "A pint o' ale and a pennoth o' bren cheese," was his fare, "and ther went dripence." He was one of the old type. Even rustic folk dress up now when they visit the Metropolis; you have a little more difficulty in recognizing the sons of the soil in the crowds of Edgware Road or Oxford Street.

There was another old fellow who used to be employed about the village, road-mending with Jacky before mentioned. He was known as "Baby, dear." This was Johnny Garret, who lived in the little old thatched cottage that stood by the church, but which is demolished now. His chief vocations in life had been those of hedge-cutter, haymaker, and harvester—three of the very finest trades since the days of Adam. When these failed or were out of season, he "snopped" stones by the roadside, pared the borders, cleaved trenches to carry off the water, and so on. He was small in stature, very thin, long nose, fierce ferret eyes, heavy brows, and thick grey hair. He brought four hammers to the stone-breaking—a sledge, a middle-sized one, and two

smaller. After sledging the heap, or a part of it, he knelt on an old sack and "snopped" away. We children helped, or hindered him, taking a hammer each, till one or the other received a clout, then the old man sent us all going. Johnny's failing was the ale; he must have a drop of the liquor, though he did not imbibe much—a pint would make the old fellow tipsy. After partaking of a drop he became very serious and talkative, addressing himself most pertinently, and answering the questions with great ceremony. The matter was usually cut short by the appearance of his wife Amy, who hauled him off roughly, and slammed up the cottage door with violence. Both lived to a ripe old age and received the parish pay—two shillings a week, and two half-gallon loaves of bread with it.

"Knock 'em down, Maas Tull, I'll pick 'em up."

"Damme, get on, shall all get locked up. Goo an wi' tha Tom, oot. Get out o' the rawd, bwoy, else I'll run awver tha. Thee't get to jail, next theng, tha's what thee't do." Old Farmer Tull, perched up in his great high blue cart, gave the horse a smart flick with the whip, and tugged the reins viciously. The aged quadruped took little notice of the hint to move itself, and continued to creep slowly along; it was used to the "long oats," and did not mind the snatching of the bit. The old farmer was off down to view his fields under the railway arch. There was a large apple-tree, laden with fruit, hanging over the hedge by the roadside. "Young Oxford from Brum," was the author of the solicitation. He was an intractable juvenile of five or six years. His

father, noted for his pedestrianism—he had tramped all over the country—had resided at Birmingham and Oxford, so his infant acquired the nickname of "Oxford from Brum." But the old man was not to be a party to thieving the apples, and left the juvenile unsatisfied, though he doubtless found other means of getting them afterwards—boys always do.

Farmer Tull was one of the very old school, who had done fairly well in his time, but had not the faculty of making the most of his earnings. Moreover, he was altogether too easy-going, and too generous to make a pile on his small farm. He lived well, paid high wages, cared for no man, and was fond—perhaps over-fond—of little drops of gin; he would have done better if he had lived more frugally, but he was not going to starve himself, not he! and he had no relatives to leave anything to. In the end he had to partake of charity himself.

The old man was tall and stout; his shoulders were round with fat, his face rather sour-looking and flabby, his eyes were grey and steely, the flesh hung down like little pockets beneath them; square forehead, heavy brows, thick nose, mouth pursed up disagreeably, double chin, frosty pate. He always wore a suit of light, large check, and hobbled about on two crab-sticks, for he was afflicted with gout. That is why he came always to ride to the fields. Wherever he needed to go he had to be hoisted up in the old high cart, for he could not walk. In the hayfield and harvest-field the same, he drove up and down, and in and out the shocks of wheat or among the hay, giving orders, grumbling and scolding;

he seldom approved of much in later years, but that was pardonable, for he was grievously tormented with his complaint. But the old man was wondrously good-natured. There was a hot cooked dinner for the men and women every day, tea in the afternoon, and supper at night; bread and cheese and ale in abundance. He used to pay the women nine shillings a week, besides food. His old wife—as kind a body as ever lived—was so stout she could not walk straight through the doors in the farmhouse, but had to negotiate them sideways.

"'Tis main dull yer this marnin', chaps. Bistn't agwain to seng us a bit of a song to liven us up narn a bit, Jimmy?" the old man said one day in the hayfield. So Jimmy, the boy, struck up with lines from an old agricultural song, used in the time of the riots, and handed down to that generation:

> "O you working men of England,
> Take heed to what I say,
> And have no rest, but do your best
> To get a fair day's pay."

"Yer, that 'ull do, that 'ull do. Dwun want to yer no more o' that. Casn't thenk o' nothin' else no different to that?" Jimmy thought a minute, then broke out again:

> "O you big-bellied farmers, you pot-bellied farmers,
> Your pride and ambition shall soon be brought low."

"Damn tha, shet up! Tha's ten times wuss than ever. Begad, if I yers any more o' that I'll fetch tha one wi' my crab. Gee up, Tom, and le's get out o' the rawd an' 'em. Zend the jar in and ha'n villed

when a's empty, and dwun go adry. You wimmin come in to the varm a' dinner-time, missis 'ull gi' ee zummat to aat." The springs of the cart went down bump! at crossing the trenches, and nearly pitched the old fellow out on his head when they rose again; he made his way across the field and round into the yard. There was a little stone platform with several steps, which reached level with the shafts of the cart; here he mounted and dismounted from the vehicle, assisted by his wife and one of the workmen; it was quite a ceremony, and lasted nearly ten minutes.

After the old man's wife died he fell on evil days. Having a manager did not pay; he was confined to his house, furthermore, and his business went "all to pieces." At last everything was gone, every penny; so the owner of the farm gave him the use of a cottage, supplied him with all the necessaries of life, and a housekeeper as well. Here the old fellow lived for some years, almost blind; you might have seen him hobble out of doors in the sunshine now and then, wearing a brightly coloured smoking-cap, and walk in the garden, that was all. He was very testy and sharp at times, and hated the parson like poison. "I dwun want to zee that old devil na more. You tell I when a's a-comin', missis, an' I'll pertend to be asleep. I dwun want to zin." He had a great fondness for sweets. His favourite "lollipop" was sugar mixed with lard, the whole rolled in pellets, like a marble. One day he was expecting a friend to see him, and it was the parson's day, too. So he gave instructions to his nurse to be sure and tell him when the friend came, but he did not wish to see the

other. By-and-by the friend came, but was not announced. He went softly up the stairs; the old man heard him, and thought it was the parson. So he shut his eyes and turned on the pillow. Thinking he was asleep, the friend went down again, and soon took his departure. By-and-by there was a loud shout downstairs: "Is a gone, missis—is a gone?"

"Who do you mean?" was the reply.

"Why the paason, to be sure."

"That wasn't the paason; that was him you wanted to see."

The old fellow swore like a trooper; the parson came in in the middle of it. The old farmer was over eighty when he died; he had no soul of a relation living.

Granny Bowles lived next the old man, and used frequently to look in upon him and minister to his needs; and when he died she performed the duties usual in such cases. She had been midwife and nurse for many years. She performed the office of Lucina and Proserpine as well: she presided over births and deaths, too. She both helped a man into the world and helped him out of it; swaddled him in the beginning and shrouded him in the end; laughed at his birth and wept over his funeral; made him comfortable in each case, or tried hard to; at any time and all times, day or night, Sunday or weekday, she was at everyone's beck and call. She left her own household to attend to the needs of others; did many and various acts of kindness and real self-sacrifice without ever knowing it or caring about it, for she was not covetous of people's favour;

whether you praised her or blamed her it made little difference; she was firm and unmoved through all, short and curt, strong-willed, and very individual.

She was very tall—six feet, or thereabout—lank and lean, stooping a little toward the last, of robust appearance. Her forehead was deeply grooved, her cheeks wrinkled, but fresh-looking; nose long, slightly Roman; high arched brows, grey eyes, lips thin, strained together; pointed chin, silver-grey hair carefully combed. She wore a woollen crossover, blue print apron, old-fashioned sun-bonnet, with a heavy pair of boots. She had lived a hard life, and brought up a large family. When she was young she worked on the farm in the fields, with a whole troop of girls beside. She was delighted to tell you all about the early days spent with the old companions—hard times they may have been, but pleasant they certainly were; it always is a joy to look back on past labours. It is work and hardship that brings out all that is finest in us, male or female. Those who do nothing have precious little retrospect; there is nothing to remember. It was of such as these Sallust was thinking in the "Catiline" when he said, "Their life and death are alike, for they are silent in each."

After she married Bowles—she always spoke of, and addressed her husband as, Bowles—she still went out to work, and while she had infant children, too. As soon as these were big enough she took them out in the fields with her, wrapped them in a shawl, and set them down under the hedge while she worked away, as they did in olden times, which we

learn from the description in "Piers Plowman." Her husband worked on the farm. He was cowman and general hand, and an excellent hedge-cutter. His complexion was almost blue with exposure; he was a hard worker, of strong principle, a dutiful husband and a stern parent. When the boys had been guilty of any offence, off came the belt, and they had it, buckle-end if the affair was serious. But the husband and father ranked second in the house; "Nance" was the predominant figure there. It was not till middle age that she adopted the profession of midwife. Jacky Bridge's mother fulfilled the office before her. They had no certificates in those days, nor were doctors often called in to attend at births in country places, and accidents were rare. I have heard Granny Bowles declare she never had a bad case in her life.

Granny was very conservative in idea and method, and stuck hard and fast to the old times; she had no patience with the new-fangled ways and means of modern people. "Lar, what wonderful things they moticas and cycicels be! Oonder who fust pervented em?" She could not bear to see ladies riding bicycles; she said it "wasn't natteral." If you were talking of a person at whose birth she assisted, she broke in with, "Aa, mun, I knows what a is; I borned un." Her patients suffered from various complaints, such as "popilation of the heart," "conjection of the lungs," and the "winsywensy" (influenza). "Poor Bowles! he did remire that chayr so." "Pon mi sinny, if chent a girt bwoy!" "Code struth a mighty, if thee dossn't come yer

when I tells tha!" "Come an hae thi vittels yer, do, wi' tha." "I dun want none." "Hev it agenst tha dost, then." "He byet that bwoy unmassiful." Her family was scattered far and wide, one here and one there; one in Australia and another in Canada. Very often, when the members of a poor family depart oversea, they never come home any more. Granny's son was drowned in the floods in Australia, and Betsy Horton's "bwoy Tom" the same; there the wives and families remained; there was no one left to bring them back to the old country.

The village shoemaker lived in the little stone cottage near the canal, and carried on the trade he had inherited from his father. Formerly he used to make many pairs of boots for the villagers, good strong, substantial footwear, just the stuff for country places, and especially to wear about the farms in the wet and cold of winter; but this is at an end now. The village cobbler, at any rate, as far as the making of new pairs of boots goes, is very nearly extinct. All the villagers now obtain their clothes and boots from the town — boots at five or six shillings a pair; shoddy cloth trousers, and jackets at a small figure; it is an age of cheapness all round. The boots are worn out in a short while, and the clothes, too. A few soakings with wet betray the former; they drop all to pieces when placed before the fire to dry; and if you come in contact with the slightest projection, or strain your trousers or coat, the falsely-woven fabric rips and tears, and might easily put you in a quandary. A good pair of men's

boots, made of best leather by the village shoemaker—"bucks," as they were called, from the old fellow's nickname—cost sixteen or eighteen shillings. When we were small boys and went to school ours cost eight shillings and sixpence, as I remember, and were securely water-tight. This we soon ascertained, because we made haste to try them in the first ditch or pool we came to.

The old shoemaker was of striking appearance, of fair height, and well-built. His head was massive, broad forehead, heavy brows, strong fierce eyes, prominent nose, thick long hair, moustache, and abundant beard, decidedly patriarchal. To my boyish and unsophisticated mind, he seemed exactly to correspond with the ideas I had conceived of the old prophets; a figure expressing dignity, gravity, profound intelligence, philosophy, and wisdom, though, of course, he did not possess these qualities, or only in a small degree. But he was shrewd enough, and grave enough, and blunt enough, with plenty of common sense, and experience of life—a hard nut to crack, argumentative, self-opinionated, out-spoken and independent, agreeing well with what I have said as to the original constitution of society in the village. In the spring of the year he went sheep-shearing with Dudley Sansum; these two were expert hands in cutting off the thick fleeces; they visited all the villages round about, and on the downs as well. At such times, if you wanted any repairs done to your boots, you had to take them somewhere else, to the town, or otherwise wait till a wet day came. That kept the shoe-

maker at home; then he set to work with hammer, awl, and wax-ends again.

His wife Ann was a kind-hearted old creature, and as deaf as a post. She was as thin as a shadow, a hard worker, and a hard liver; her old face was wrinkled and brown; she had worked her fingers to the bone almost in trying to eke out enough to supplement her husband's earnings, for week in and week out his profits were very small; it was a great struggle to live. So Ann went out washing and charing, and did sewing as well; from early morning till late night she was toiling and toiling to earn an honest shilling. Poor they were, and poor they were like to be; the better day did not actually dawn for them; hoping and hoping, they died before they were aware of it, in the midst of their poverty, as happens to so many deluded creatures who have not the power to grasp the disposition of life, and realize the future in the present. It is always "to-morrow," "to-morrow," and "some day," with most people. With each rising of the sun that is as far away as ever; it is the present hour, the present moment only that avails; we must strike at once, and put nothing off if we would do anything for our benefit. When that which we call to-morrow comes —it is only to-day resurrected—we shall be no better; more probably we shall be weaker and worse than before.

The shoemaker and his wife lived happily enough together, though he was often harsh and unfeeling towards her, and called her "an old fool," and shouted at her at the top of his voice, and spoke

of her to everyone as "my owld ooman"; but she bore it all very patiently, and nodded and smiled, and winked now and then, and shed a few tears, and was most slavish in her attendance on him, denying herself the necessaries of life to procure things for his comfort, though she was nearly broken-hearted at the end, for he fell ill with cancer, and because of her deafness would not have her at the bedside, but motioned with his arms, and told the others to "keep her away; he didn't want her there." After her husband died she continued in the cottage a little while on parish pay, and finally went to the workhouse, where she died at eighty. In her young days, as a girl, she worked about the fields for the farmer, minding the pigs and sheep, and received a piece of bacon in weekly payment. If everyone had as kind a heart as the old shoemaker's wife, how much better a great many of us would be, and the world about us as well!

The next building up the highway is the old lock-house, converted into labourers' cottages now; and just beyond that, over opposite in the field, is a picturesque farm-house and buildings surrounded with tall elms, an orchard on each side, and a large garden. The chattering rooks build in the boughs above, the blackbirds nest in the hedgerow and apple-trees, and the railway runs along at the back. It was to this place I bore the milk with yoke and pails from The Priory, and afterwards worked here as well.

Farmer Ody was alive then; to-day the farm is conducted by his widow. He was short, fat, and

corpulent; the words of the old song quoted just now would have fitted in with his condition very well. He would have been better and might have lived longer if he had worked harder. I see and know a good many in a similar position—puffing and panting, short-winded, dyspeptic, choleric, uncomfortable, and miserable. Early rising and a little vigorous exercise would cure a great deal of this; they would forget half, or the whole of their ills, if they had to work for their living. A little misfortune has a wonderful curative effect on the ills of prosperity. Nature likes to be vexed, battered, and assaulted sometimes. Ploughing and harrowing the soil makes it sweeter and richer; humanity is the better for a little hardship, and even for a catastrophe now and then; we value life and health and security all the more for it.

If you had occasion to call at the farm you would have been almost certain to find the master in the yard somewhere, hatless, and in his shirtsleeves, both hands thrust deeply in his trouser pockets, giving instructions to the men, or conversing with someone or other. About the first words he said to you were, "Come along in an hev ee a bit o' bread and cheese, an a drap o' beer, look;" or if you happened to be a juvenile, he would promptly put you to do a small job or two, brush out the stable, harness the pony, carry a pail of water for "missis" in the dairy, and so on. After you had done this—he often delayed you a considerable time—he told you to "go down to the door, look, an see missis, an er'll gi ee a bit o' puddin';" both master and "missis" too were well

noted for kindness and hospitality. When a new boy from anywhere called, the farmer asked him his name, where he came from, who he worked for, and what his wages were. Then he requested him to say if he had a knife, money, and string. If the youngster had all three he laughed loudly and cried out, "Then you be a lucky fella; for you can cut, buy, or tie, look!"

The farmer's wife made butter and cheese, and baked all their own bread. We heated the oven with faggots; when the walls were become white, that was hot enough. Then all the ashes were raked out, the floor cleaned with a damp mop, and the loaves inserted. I have never tasted such sweet bread since, nor such rich butter. There was a big family of children. When any of these had got into mischief they were tied up to the posts in the yard with a loose cord all the afternoon. They feared their papa very much; if he only looked at them severely when they were young they burst into tears.

There was no ploughed land attached to the farm, so the master used to purchase a few acres of standing corn—wheat, oats, or barley—away up on the downs, on Wanborough Plain, at the foot of Liddington Hill; that is how I first came to go there. That was twenty-three years ago this very autumn, and two years after the death of Richard Jefferies, the great Nature-writer, of whom, peculiarly enough, I had never heard till a few years ago, and none of whose writings I had seen till I was several years past thirty. Then by chance a new friend, a

Londoner, an enthusiastic admirer of Jefferies, and a poet, sent me one of his books to read, and introduced me to that wonderful personality who was born, and who lived, in such close proximity to the village. This is not the place for literary discussion, so that I will forbear further comment, but you may imagine that the world, and especially this corner of it, has not been quite the same to me since; it is fuller and richer, more wildly and riotously beautiful than ever.

After the sheaves had been brought home and the ricks made—we fetched it down by way of Kite Hill, about six miles by road—came the harvest-home, for the farmer would not be less than the others in this respect, though the crop was a purchased one. The food in this case was cooked in the boiler; the brew-house fireplace was not big enough. Master came and stirred the fire now and then, put on more coal with the shovel, and afterwards thrust it in the boiler and shovelled the meat and vegetables over all together. This brought "missis" out in a furious rage, who scolded him soundly, and called him a "nasty bagger," and declared she "wouldn't touch a bit an't now;" but master laughed out and said, "he was clane anough," and "us all got to aat a peck o' dirt afore us dies," which is proverbial with the villagers. Presently all the men and boys came in, and master and "missis" too, and the meal was served about six o'clock. No one thought of the coal-shovel, and if they had it would not have made much difference; it was a hearty and happy company that sat around the improvised long table in the great farm-kitchen.

Many tramps and unfortunates pass along the main road leading by the farm at all times of the year, but chiefly in the drier seasons. These beg their way along from house to house through the village. They are of all sorts and conditions; those who have been "tinkers, tailors, soldiers, sailors, rich men, poor men, beggar-men, and thieves." There are some of other nationalities too—black and white, French, German, Italian, and others as well. There are many seafaring men who miss their boat east or west, and walk to meet it at London, Bristol, or Cardiff. Some of the travellers are very impudent, others are quiet enough. Some tramps frequent the village periodically. Where they have been well treated they may contrive to set a mark for their mates who follow to recognize a hospitable house. Many beg food, some money, and others merely drinkables. A common visitor is the one who meekly asks you first for hot water from the kettle, next a pinch of tea, then a spoonful or two of sugar, and finally food to eat with it. One old fellow called on Granny Bowles, and on being given bread and meat, would not go till he had obtained salt and mustard, too. I have often been asked for my newspaper by tramps as I was coming home from work in the evening; they wished to be informed of current events.

Once a tramp asked me for money, and I afterwards gleaned some information of his life from him. He was about forty, tall and fine-looking, with black hair, intellectual face, a long scar halfway round the forehead over the ear, and another on his thigh, which

he made me feel through his thin trousers; it was like a piece of cord four to six inches long. He was a clever talker, keen and shrewd, and it struck me very forcibly that he might be a villain, too. He said he had been in the navy, and had served abroad in West Africa, and at cable-laying in the Pacific. The scars were from sabre-cuts, received on expeditionary service, he said, which may or may not have been true. He was a very independent and devil-may-care fellow, and pleased me well enough, till, lifting up the flaps of his old black coat, he showed me two murderous-looking knives, which he carried suspended in sheaths from a leathern belt round the waist. He had never had occasion to use them in this country, he said, and perhaps he never would, but if he ever came in a tight corner he should not scruple to employ them. After this confidence my boyish heart quaked a little, and I felt nervous of my vagabond companion; then, as it was fast getting dark, I wished him a brave "good-night" and retreated. The sight of those weapons, and the man's determined behaviour in the twilight, made an impression on me; I can still see them plainly to this day. How timid the cottagers' wives would have been if they had known of this! They would have closed the door upon tramps and beggars for ever afterwards.

CHAPTER X

Mark Titcombe and Nellie Kempster—Dudley Sansum—
—Farmer Burbage—The old dissenting parson—William
Maisey—The lady of the manor.

See that old cottage there, dark and gloomy and dilapidated, with the thatch half blown away, the chimney toppling down, shutters up at the windows, and padlocks on the gate and door? Some building or other has been taken away at each end; what is left now is merely the middle of the original block. Of the extremities, one part fell down, and the other was pulled down, after the death of the old woman, who dwelled there. This was the home of old Mark Titcombe, of whom I have several times spoken, and of his father and mother before him. There is a tiny porch over the door, clustered with ivy, which afterwards clambers up the wall, and an old-fashioned creeper with it. Everlasting peas bloom each side of the porch. Just beside the door is a flower-bed, with a box-border a couple of feet high around it. In February this was white with snowdrop; in the summer it contained a large cluster of brilliant flaming peony. Before the window is a small garden, which used to be bright with primrose and lenten lilies, tulip, azalea, and an old-fashioned fuchsia. Years ago this was

most neatly kept. When the old man became feeble and could no longer attend to it, it became overrun with weeds, and now it is quite desolate. Here is a road leading to the fields—this way to St. Margaret, that to Blindmoor; straight before you, over the little brook, to Dark Lane, which abounded in delightful fern of several kinds, and sweet, dark blue violets.

The old man was a rather eccentric person. By some he was termed a hermit, by others a miser. The fact of the matter is, he was both and he was neither. That he lived in seclusion, granted; that he was exceedingly frugal, and cautious of spending his money, granted also; but he was too sociable to be really a hermit, and misers hoard their gold just for the sake of possessing it, while he stored his because he was provident, and wished it to be enough to carry him quite through life's journey. He was just disappointed in this latter wish, however. As to how he came to possess money, who had been nothing but a farm-labourer, that may be interesting to some of you, at any rate. In the first place, his old dad before him had been careful and thrifty, and had saved money, so the quality was hereditary. This had been done by sheer courage and—I might as well say it, though it will scarcely be understood by very many, I fear—that which is called sacrifice and self-denial, unhappily so rare in this generation of ours. The old father had worked hard and lived hard, had been sober and natural in his habits of life, and the result was an independent old age and several hundred pounds to be divided among his sons. Mark came in for at least a hundred of these,

and soon added more to the pile. Where such an example had been set he could not help but profit by it. He followed faithfully in the course mapped out by his agricultural parent, and thrived apace.

Speaking of hard fare and frugality, I know that sounds very unpleasant to most people nowadays, and a great many would deem the former absolutely impossible, but that is merely an effect. It is ridiculous to pretend that we really could not subsist more simply and economically; that we could not eat this and could not eat that. Millions have done it and attained long years. A great many of the cleverest, and all the wisest, practise abstention now, and not only do not suffer from it, but benefit by it. As to the relish of plain wholesome food, that is sweet enough until the appetite has been indulged and the palate vitiated. If we were hungry, rich, poor, all alike, with no distinction, we could eat simple food now; but hunger is not universal enough, except among the very poorest. The fact is, we eat and drink too much; we are slaves to our stomachs; we are swallowed up by ourselves; we subject one part of us to gratify the other; the heart and soul and limbs are in bondage to the belly, or otherwise to the eye; and that is the cause of much of our suffering and unhappiness and poverty.

The old man was of average height, and very round-shouldered; he looked to be almost hump-backed. He had a fine nose and features, an intellectual forehead, beetle brows, restless, evasive eyes —he was very suspicious of strangers—pointed chin, a wrinkled and withered face, pleasant-looking, pate

as bald as a basin, and one solitary tooth in his head, like a minor gravestone. His old hands were as hard as wood, drawn into a shape nearly inhuman, and his finger-nails were abnormally long—like birds' talons almost. His legs were feeble and weak, his old knees knocked together; when he walked he clutched a stout stick with both hands, and leaned heavily on it. His trousers were of corduroy, waistcoat of the same; he always wore a short white smock over all. If it was cold, he muffled himself up in a thick warm pilot coat, or wore a sack round his shoulders, with billy-cock hat, or one of the vicar's left-off. On Sundays, when he dressed himself up —if he ever did—you might have seen him with a top-hat nearly a yard high, which gave him a most quaint appearance, though he seldom walked out in it, but pottered about indoors and round the garden adjoining the fields. As for a bath, he had probably not had such a thing for sixty years; yet he was of most robust health and constitution, and kept himself clean enough externally, at all events, and his cottage as well.

His dwelling was simplicity itself. There was one very large room downstairs. This was kitchen, parlour, and sitting-room combined. The floor was of large and small flat stones, which the old man smeared over once a week and whitened the whole with free-stone. The fireplace was very wide and old-fashioned, simply the original hearth, with a few bricks and bars which he had built up himself. Halfway up the chimney, on one side, was a bread oven. There was a cupboard adjoining the fireplace. Here,

in a little stone pot, the golden sovereigns, often amounting to a considerable sum, were kept, and the bank-book as well. If it had been suspected that there was so much money there, someone or other might have been tempted to break in and obtain it, but only one beside the old man knew of its existence. There were three small deal tables, and three straight-backed chairs. On the mantelpiece were half a dozen old-fashioned painted clay figures—of dogs, cocks, and other animals, which always reminded me, somehow or other, of those rude images and idols, the "household gods" of the pagan ancients, and of such as have been dug up among the ruins of old Troy, and other eastern cities. On the wall opposite the window were shelves for the crockery-ware, containing a little good china, the property of his mother, an ancient clock that had long been silent, and two little coloured prints, entitled "Peace" and "Plenty," which the old fellow one day gave to me with much ceremony, together with his antiquated silver watch, for a keepsake, and which I still have in my possession, out of kindness for his memory.

There was a stout rack affixed to the huge beam that supported the ceiling. This formerly contained the flitch of bacon, and is to be met with in most old farm-houses and cottages. Adjoining this was a good-sized pantry. A broad stairway led to the bedrooms, two in number. The old thatch roof was as full of starlings as it could be. His food was of the plainest kind—bread and a little butter, lard, cheese, or boiled bacon, and potatoes. He drank tea once a day, in the evening. For many years he only had

two meals a day — breakfast and dinner combined at noon, and tea about six. After that he made up a good fire of wood, and sat dozing in his chair, looking into the flames, thinking of his old mother and father, and times of long ago. Sometimes when I was sitting with him, very often half asleep myself, warmed with a good glass of home-made wine—a quantity of which he brewed every year with fruit from his garden—he would suddenly wake up with a start, and nearly jump out of his chair, then rub his eyes and laugh, and tell me what he had been dreaming. He was generally off on the road somewhere with his team of horses—perhaps it was to Hungerford, or Marlborough—or was out in such and such a "ground," along with his old dad. Once he began talking to his mother, and another time was "runnin' aater the bwoys at ploy."

There was one remarkable and deplorable thing about the old man, and that was his almost incredible superstition; he had sold himself to the devil, and the compact was sealed for ever and ever. It was absolutely useless to attempt to reason with him on the point, or to show the impossibility of such a thing; it had not the slightest effect, he had sold himself to "Old Nick," and there was an end of it. How did it happen? Ah! that I could never tell. I often questioned the old man to know how the bargain was conducted, but he would never tell me that; he simply declared that he "selled himself to Old Nick out in Maaster Pingedar's (Pinnegar's) ground, by the canal yander," when he was a young fellow. Oftentimes I tried to correct him from the

error, and taught him to pray, and to think of Christ, Who came to save the world from sin, but he always burst out in piteous tears, sobbing like a child, and saying: "'Tis all right for t'other people, but nat vor I. Chent no good vor I. Old Nick got I right anough. He's allus along wi' ma, a waitin' vor ma, a swerin' and blerin' against God A'mighty; he won never let ma aloan no more." And this delusion he continued in right up to the end, for, though many came to see him, clergy and others, and prayed no end of times, it made no difference; he was fully persuaded that he was bound to the Evil One, nothing could shake his belief in that. To say that the old man was deficient in education, that he could not read or write, and had led a somewhat isolated life, is scarcely to explain away the superstition, for there have been many thousands exactly so situated, who have been reasonably intelligent, healthy in mind, highly receptive, and rational in disposition and character.

So far I have told you of the old man himself, and his individual mode of life; now I must tell you a little of another matter, the romantic side this time, if you will. You have seen that he lived alone, or nearly so, and perhaps you have wondered why he did not marry a wife, and have someone to care for him, and brighten his hearth and home, as all sensible men do, especially since he was courting a sweetheart till he was over seventy; but the fact of the matter is, Nellie Kempster, for that was her name, would never consent to the match, so the courtship continued from childhood almost, year after year, right up to the old woman's death.

Nellie lived in the little cottage on the opposite side of the road, but a stone's-throw from Mark's door. The building was very old and shaky, covered with ivy, and the roof was of tiles, green as the lichen on the tree-trunks almost. A little straight poplar grew exactly by the porch—it is still standing in front of you there—high elms grew at the back, and stretched their mighty arms out over the roof, as if to protect it from the raving winds, and destructive seasons. Here she had dwelt from childhood; it had been her old mother's cottage before her; she held it in indisputable possession. Singularly enough, her means and condition were identical with those of the old man. Her father was an agricultural labourer, who, somehow or other, had managed to save a pile. Nellie went out in the fields to work as a young woman, and saved, too; when the old people came to die, she was left with a considerable stock of golden sovereigns, enough to keep her for half a century, and still leave her with a balance of two hundred pounds at the bank on her death.

Nellie had been a handsome girl, and was good-looking to the last, though she became very untidy in her later years, and could not be induced to adopt a more reasonable mode of living. She was not very tall, with a perfectly shaped nose, well-moulded face, bright eyes, rounded chin, even features, beautifully shaped hands and fingers; and, in contradistinction to the old man, she was intelligent, very well read, able to converse on a host of subjects, was keen, light, witty, laughing, or serious, as circumstances demanded. Her old people and Mark's had been neighbours all

their lives; that is how they contracted the intimacy. Jacky Bridges and others used to torment Mark and say: "Why ever dossn't take and marry Ellen, and live wi' 'er, nat kip trapesin' up and down yer from one place to another;" to which the old man replied: "Her won hae ma, tha's knowst, tha's how that is." "Then be jiggered if I shouldn't lave er alwun, an' let the contrary bagger look aater herself," Jacky responded; but Mark shook his head, and kept up his attendance on her. He fetched her wood for the fire, and water for the kettle, locked her in every night with a padlock on the door, then went home to sleep, and came back in the morning and unfastened it again, and prepared his sweetheart's breakfast. After that, he pottered about in the fields, or in the green lane, picking up dry wood under the trees, and came back to dinner, tea, or supper; year after year he continued the duty.

The old cottage was in a great muddle. There was only one small room downstairs, and Heaven only knows how many up, for no one ever went there to see beside the old dame, and the stairway did not look very inviting. The downstairs room contained a fireplace, a lattice window with several broken panes, stuffed up with rags and paper, and piles upon piles of furniture, and rubbish of every description; you could scarcely get inside for it. The mantelshelf was full of old-fashioned candlesticks and ornaments; a grandfather's clock stood by the stairs door; on the other side was a dresser, full of crocks, and some fine old china-ware, thick with the dust of ages. Every chair was piled up

with books, newspapers, bales of dress-material, blankets and sheets, muslins, laces, calicoes, etc., rotten and rotting. A large pitcher for the water stood just within the door. The porch was of rustic work, thickly covered with ivy. Here we children used to gather and peer inside at the old man and woman, as they sat at table. Nellie called us to go in, and made us sherbet and ginger-pop, or helped us to tea from the pot, and amused us with tales and storyettes, or asked us to sing to her, which we did, especially Sunday afternoons. After we had sung, she would say: "Tha's it, my dears; run along home now, and come and see poor Ellen again to-morrow, after school." There was a widely prevalent belief that Ellen was a witch; many people came from quite a distance to take a peep at her, if possible, but that was the merest nonsense. She was not a witch, and she was not superstitious, or cunning, or crafty, or vicious, but only unfortunate. Friends she had, and relatives, living not far away, but they never came to see her; they were shocked and offended at her untidiness, and gave her a wide berth, but on her death they ran forward eagerly enough, and grabbed all that was to be had; but that is human nature all over.

Toward the last, the old woman cut a most sorry figure; she became more negligent than ever. Her clothes were nothing but rags from head to heel; her legs and feet were naked in a pair of old shoes; her arms were naked, too, and a great part of her body beside. The busy-bodies ran from house to house and whispered, and peeped about whenever

they passed the door, in the hope of seeing something or other more to gossip about; but old Mark was as faithful as ever. At last she fell sick, and had to keep to her bed. Neither had the moral sense or energy to send for a doctor; no one attended her but the old man. In a day or two she died. The circumstances demanded an inquiry. Everyone was indignant with the old man. At the inquest he was severely censured; they told him he ought to go to prison. Mark stood shivering and shaking like a leaf; he had only carried out Nellie's wish, not to let the busy-bodies in; he did not understand the law; he had been faithful to her every command. So the old woman was put away. The cottage was ransacked; there were about twenty gallons of sparkling wine discovered, and several lots of gold, poked about in different places, with a good fat bank-book, as already mentioned. The cottage was immediately sold and razed to the ground. Every vestige was carted away; only the little straight poplar-tree remains now to point the place where the dwelling-house stood.

And what of the old man, after all? He crept about like a ghost for years afterwards, and was inconsolable; he was all alone in the world now that Ellen was gone. Most people looked on him with suspicion, and all with contempt, which made him feel more solitary than ever; he shrank from people as though he had been a hunted criminal; it was truly a pathetic condition. It had always been the old fellow's most devout wish that he might be able to end his days in independence, and not be

forced to go to the workhouse. That is why he screwed and pinched and lived hard, for he had a mortal dread of "that place over yander," the walls of which he could plainly see from the field behind the cottage. So he parcelled the money out, and frequently computed the number of years remaining, and spent accordingly. About ten pounds a year kept him. Four pounds of this were for rent, and the other for food and firing. The seasons slipped along like magic. Four score came, and found the old man well enough, except for being "main tottery" on the feet. Then fourscore-one, fourscore-two. The little hoard was dwindling, but there was no reason to fear. Then an accident happened. One day he was missed, and on the neighbours breaking in the door he was discovered lying helpless under the wall, too sick and feeble to move. So several of his acquaintances stepped in; as he was circumstanced he could not refuse any terms they made; he was bed-ridden for nearly three years. The little pile melted more quickly away, and at last all was gone. The old man was broken-hearted; he knew what it meant; there was nothing else remaining. He had toiled in vain; all his thrift was for nothing. The long dread he had entertained, vague and uncertain for years, had assumed a monstrous shape; it grieved and it maddened him to think of it; perhaps he was not a philosopher, though prating is cheap enough until you yourself are afflicted with an immoderate misfortune; then, as someone has said, "counsel turns to passion."

One night when I called to see him, coming home from work, he burst into tears. "Tha be gwoin' to take ma awoy, an I dwun want ta go," he cried. I tried to comfort him, as well as I was able, but all to no purpose; he was beside himself with grief. And was it any wonder? Would *you* like to have gone, if *you* had been in his place? After living within those old walls, hallowed with memories of his mother and dad, his childhood and many things beside, for nearly eighty years, working and slaving, and sweating and stinting, for what? for what? But I have told you already. Of course he did not want to go; and quite right too. It was natural and manly, honest and brave; it is only the coward that thinks otherwise; and the spirit should be commended, not blamed and stifled down, and quenched out of existence. Several times the officers called and asked him if he would go to the "house," but each time he answered defiantly, "No, I wunt." The old man shrank into the bed-clothes, and peered out at them over the top of the sheet. "I'd soonder starve, an' die in mi bed fust, than go to that place," he protested. Then the officers went away. The next day a conveyance stopped before the cottage, in came the officer again, and two men to carry him off. At first the old man wept like a child, then bawled and shouted at the interlopers: "Lave ma alwun." "I wunt go." "Let ma die in mi bed." "Get a hatchet an chop mi 'ed off;" but all to no purpose. They dragged him out of bed, pulled a pair of woollen stockings on his shrunk shanks, clapped a blanket and an old coat around him,

hauled him out of the cottage, slipped him in the conveyance, banged the door, and drove off as hard as they were able.

He did not live many weeks at the workhouse. Once I saw him there. A smile lit up his features when he recognized me, and the big tears rolled down his cheek. How he clung to my hand! He looked years older. I tried to be bright and talked of old times, of Ellen and the cottage, and told him to cheer up, though I knew it was only make-believe. I felt the biggest hypocrite alive. Then the time came to leave. I promised to come again soon, but there was no need any more. A fortnight after he was taken in the night, and was dead in an hour. They brought him to the village for burial, past the cottage. It was quite a grand turnout; a black horse in the parish shillibeer, and artificial flowers for decorating the coffin. It was an insult to worthy old bones; but what matters! The very grave was cold and uncharitable, too, for that was nearly a foot deep in water, and a hard storm of rain and sleet came on as we gathered around to hear the Burial Service. "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," said the parson. Somebody answered "Amen." The mourners left the graveside; the big bell clanged out; that was the end of Mark Titcombe, as far as I can tell you, though I doubt not there have been hundreds of others who have lived and died in very similar conditions and circumstances.

So much for the tragic side of life. Dudley Sansum was of a totally different nature altogether, quite unlike old Mark, though he lived beside him

for some years. He had worked for Farmer Davis of Sennington, and his father before him, all his life, and had won fame as a mower and fagger, a shearer of sheep, and many things beside. In addition to this, he and Tommy Bowles, of Sennington also, went about with the steam threshing-tackle all round the neighbourhood; perhaps he was better known in this capacity than in any of the others. How proud he was of the engine and machine! He worshipped them almost. I can see him now, standing with one hand on the driving lever, his face red and black together, expressing perfect joy at the task. Sometimes he stood like this for nearly half an hour at a stretch; he liked to be close to his engine, and to feel the oscillation of it.

Old Dudley was one of the happiest mortals alive, and one of the simplest, too. He cared nothing for the sorrows and troubles of other people, and had very few of his own. Life to him was a thing to enjoy; no riddle, no puzzle, no obscurity, and no hardship; it was as easy and plain as the nose on his face—he lived. He knew there was seed to plant, sheep to be sheared, hay to make in summer, and whole fields of golden, waving corn to be reaped or fagged in harvest, and after that, the threshing all round, year after year the same. He rose early. Every morning, about five, you might have seen him with corduroy trousers, short white smock, and billy-cock hat, with broad flag basket slung over his shoulder, and all through the summer a little jar of ale, which he took from home; there was plenty more of this at the farm. He was short and stocky,

plenty fat enough, a little bow-legged, and of great strength. His face was round and jolly, red as the sunrise almost, with good features, top lip clean-shaven, a little beard under the chin, and the merriest of twinkling eyes; he was full of jest and fun, and great good-nature. And how skilfully he mowed the grass down and fagged the corn! It was a real pleasure to see him at the task, and he made as light of it as if it had been the simplest matter in the world; but that is the mark of good workmanship. In the harvest his wife and the children used to go in the fields with him, and pull bonds, and tie up the sheaves. No one could touch old Dudley at harvest-work; he could cut an acre a day, if it stood well.

In the evening, after work, he pottered about in the garden, or else strolled down to have a glass of fourpenny with Jemmy Boulton and Jacky Bridges, and talk about the hay and harvest. "Aw, good crap, fine crap; never seed sich a crap o' whate in mi life." "I back our maaster's ull byet yourn, look." "Never in this world, Jemss; it can't be done." Then Jacky chimed in: "Hold an a bit, both an tha. I can tell ee who byets ee all, an tha's Maaster Westell up yander in Hoelands; for tha's the masterpiece of all I ever did see." After settling the point, and drinking several further pots of fourpenny between them, the company would dissolve. At festival times Dudley indulged a little more freely, though in nothing stronger than ale. Then he would get exceedingly merry, and dance with the old mates all the evening. *He* did not go to the workhouse in *his* old age, not he! When he could no longer work,

he lived with his son and grandchildren in the lane, and died, as a good old rustic should, at a ripe age, surrounded by his family.

I have mentioned Henry Love, who farmed Rowborough field. He was a bachelor. His dad lived to a great age, and was nicknamed "Totty," because he used to "tot out" the gin, it is said. When I was very small I used to mistake him for Josh Hughes, my grandfather, and used to address him as such. Henry was very quiet and unassuming. He was tall and fine-looking, and wore a top-hat to church every Sunday morning. The school governess, an elderly body, said he was the finest gentleman in the place, and fell desperately in love with him, and pressed her suit with some persistence, but Henry was really too shy. All he could say about it was: "Aw, the dooce! the dooce!" and "The devil!" He was altogether too phlegmatic to burn with the grand passion. Whenever he went to the fields he wore a buttoned smock and rode a grey pony. An old woman over ninety was his housekeeper. He was a noted lover of small drops of gin. One day he said he hoped he should never have a long illness, and two mornings afterwards was found dead in his bed.

"Hel-lo, my pritties!" Farmer Burbage, seated in the milk-cart among his churns, had just turned the corner leading towards the highway there, and suddenly came up with two young girls, labourers' daughters, who were standing on the greensward. He is one of the kindest men alive, a good farmer, though an unfortunate one, and universally a

favourite. He is old and grey-headed, grey-bearded, too. Soon after coming to the farm he severely chopped his foot with the axe, and then was run down by a motor-car, and nearly killed; but he got the better of each accident, and is almost as well as ever. His good-wife makes butter; it is all pasture-land; they keep much poultry beside. The farmers' wives always manage the poultry; generally it is their exclusive property, their share of the live stock. These meet in confab., and buy, sell, or exchange. "Have ee got a good cock-bird to sper, missus? a busy un, mind, else a ent no good." Or perhaps it is ducks, geese, or turkeys. "Wher be off to now, missus?" the farmer says. "Aw, gwain to zet tha owld 'en; must do zummat for a livin'." Perhaps the dealer has picked up some stale eggs from one of the farms, is informed of it by the customers, and returns them. "You never got them eggs yer. Why, bless you, mister, as soon as my owld ooman yers a hen cackle her runs aater the egg as if it was to save her life."

One boy helped the old farmer and his wife. He was had from the workhouse, and was treated as one of the family, as if he were the only son and heir to everything. When he left to enter the navy you would have thought the old people were in mourning for a dear relative. "As long as ever you wants a home to come to, my bwoy, yer's one for ee," the old fellow said. When the time came for the lad to leave, the farmer and his wife, too, went with him to the train. There, in front of all the people, tears were shed. "Harry cried, and mother cried, and I

cried, and we all cried together," the old man declared.

Daniel Lewis was a dissenting parson—a strict Baptist; and, together with his wife Elizabeth, kept the village bakery and stores. He was rather tall, very grave and sedate-looking, with prominent nose, kind eyes, clean-shaven top lip, thin white beard under the chin, projecting in the shape of a crescent —an excellent physical type of the preacher. He never preached in the village, but always went away each Sabbath, somewhere or other. Away from home he was held in high esteem; among his every-day acquaintances he was ignored—of no account at all; a man is always despised most among his intimates and kindred. Grandfather Bridges drove him out to preach every Sunday. At such times he wore a black suit, round felt hat, and always, when it was cold or damp, a large white or plaid woollen scarf, wrapped several times around the neck and mouth. He always took a large umbrella, and if that was not enough, there was grandfather's monster blue one, big enough to cover a haystack, almost.

The old couple lived very simply, even severely; trade was bad at the shop, and scarcely anyone paid for what they had; he had not the heart to demand the debts. He was also skilled in herbs, and used to make all kinds of strange drinks and mixtures. An ointment made from "jack by the hedge" (garlic mustard) was one of his favourite healers; we children used to make this as well. The old man brewed his own beer in a large pot, which he boiled in the bread-oven. In his old age he had a cup of

hot beer with bread in it every night before retiring, and when he was dying he called for the same—it was the only nourishment he could take. Formerly the whole premises were his own, orchard and all, but even he could not thrive by being lenient, and giving his bread and goods away. So it happened that when he became old, and wanted rest and a competency, he found himself with nothing at all, in debt, and ruined. His house and all was mortgaged and sold; there he was, a helpless and poverty-stricken old man, trembling lest, after all, he should be forced to enter the workhouse. But how patient and gentle and uncomplaining he was! How bravely and philosophically he bore with everything! And he was so poor and feeble; he often fell down in the passage, tottering to answer the bell in the shop. Elizabeth was not so calm, and more than once scolded the old man; but he always answered her with perfect affection and humility, and said: "But I love you just the same." When he died—he simply slept his last hours away—his fellow-worshippers came over to the village and buried him according to their own particular rites and custom, and the business passed into other hands.

There used to be a great many more "characters" about the village. The old Thatcher and his wife were a unique pair. He was at one time an agitator, and secretary of the old-time branch of the agricultural union in this district, but that has long ago died out here. He was very hearty and independent, unconquerable in spirit, and fond of a glass; "Must ha' drap beer," was a frequent saying of his. He did not believe

in the Divinity, and never went to church but once a year, that was on Club-Day. He would not have gone then if he had not been compelled, but on that festival each member must attend the service or be fined half a crown, and the old thatcher could not afford to lose such a large sum of money as that. He was in constant work all the year round, for, though almost every farm has its rough thatcher, they are not capable of performing skilled work, such as covering cottages, and farmhouses and buildings.

William Maisey is another veteran of the field, as frosty as midwinter in appearance, but as genial as May in disposition and temperament. He is a typical rustic, rude and unlettered—I will not tolerate the word "ignorant" as applied to agricultural people—knowing and caring little or nothing for books and studious pursuits, but well-versed in the trade of the country-side; pigs and horses, and cattle, cocks and hens, ploughing, sowing, reaping and threshing—that is the proficiency you want in the village. The old man is feeble and tottery now, especially since the old sow with the litter knocked him over in the sty, which surprised him very much; she had always been so quiet before. His health is good, however, and his endurance remarkable; he has never kept late hours, has lived simply, and never wasted nature. Only yesterday I saw him in the field at bush-harrow, and he is over eighty now. His white smock was tucked up around his waist; he held the hempen halter in his hand, and was striding along like a youngster of twenty. His expression is wonderfully kind; he looks to be nearly always smiling. But

everyone felt a shock when he took the carving-knife and cut the throat of one of the horses that had fallen in the ditch recently. The ditch was very deep, and the poor animal had fallen in on its back: it was impossible to extricate it, and no one had a gun handy. So William took a big, sharp knife and slit the poor brute's throat. "Bin an polished un off," he said. It seemed cruel; but perhaps it was better than allowing it to suffer long tortures.

The manor-house was held by an elderly maiden lady. She owned half the parish or more; all the prime farms were in her possession, in which she took a most active interest to the last, for, though well advanced in years, she was very acute and business-like. There were several agents to supervise details, but she always directed the general scheme of operations. She was very strict and severe in rules and regulations as touching the farms and cottages, prudish and conservative in method, but sterling in motive and just in principle. Her life-long effort was to maintain a "clean" village, and though she often failed in her endeavours, she went a long way towards being successful. At her death it was said there was "not a bad debt in the place," which is a great compliment to any village community.

She was very private and secluded in habit, and guarded her age jealously. None of the villagers could attain to a knowledge of it, which was a source of real concern to some of them. The wives especially like to know these little matters, for humanity, and especially feminine humanity, is much engaged with

trifles. As to the concealment of age, that is a very ancient characteristic. When Cicero was at dinner one night, his companion, surprised to learn that the age of a lady opposite was no more than thirty—how trivial man is, after all! he is little better than the other sex—turned to him and asked him, in a whisper, if it could really be true; whereupon Cicero replied: "I must needs believe it, for she has been telling me so this ten years."

When the lady of the manor died, the villagers thought they should know the extent of her years then, at any rate, and came in great numbers to the funeral on tiptoe with expectation, but they were once more disappointed. The old lady understood the matter perfectly, and was determined not to gratify the curiosity of the villagers; there was no record of years on the name-plate, to the vexation and chagrin of the busy-bodies, many of whom had inconvenienced themselves in order to be present to read the eagerly expected announcement.

CHAPTER XI

The railway—Accidents to cattle—Making the line—Ancient travel—Platelayers—Milk-cart boys—The signalman—Flowers of the "batter"—Priory Farm—The gaming farmer—The old canal—Boating and fishing—The lock-keeper—Henry Hawkins—Aquatic plants.

A RAILWAY crosses through the village. This enters on the west side through a deep cutting a mile and a half long, passing beneath Ermin Street, and afterwards emerges upon a high embankment which continues past the River Cole, and enters another cutting opposite Bourton. A substantial stone arch conducts the historic roadway above the iron track, and is known as the Roman bridge. Presently you come to a signal-station and a level crossing which connects the fields of a farm. This is an extremely dangerous spot for cattle and traffic; several accidents have happened here, serious ones too, which really and truly concern the actual life and interest of the village. Once an old man was driving his herd of milking cows over on a foggy morning, and a train dashed into them and slaughtered no less than seventeen on the spot. This happened on a Sunday. A neighbouring butcher carted the poor crushed carcasses off to his sheds; beef was very plentiful in the locality all the following week.

Once after this a similar accident occurred; eight beasts were killed this time. The poor farmer was in dire distress, but the railway people came to his assistance and helped him bear the loss. Once again a young fellow was crossing with a manure-cart, and a fast express dashed into it. Happily, the horse had just cleared the rails; the impact quite severed the body of the cart from the shafts, and, while the animal and driver escaped, that was forced along the line in front of the engine for nearly a quarter of a mile. All these things furnish the villagers with much matter for excitement and discussion; they can think of nothing else for weeks and months afterwards.

The railway has been built about seventy years. Before that time the village was much quieter than it is now; the long, heavy thunder of the freight trains, and the sharper sound of the expresses, did not echo through the lanes and meadows and all up the valley; there was little to be heard then but the old coach rattling along the highway and the lowing of cattle about the farms. The dismal noise of the motor-horns is of recent date, too, and the clouds of thick dust trailing two miles long with it; the old folk would be amazed if they could see what we have to endure nowadays.

Old Mark Titcombe could very well remember the village before the line was made, and could tell you the names of the meadows which were enclosed to make the track. It was in one of these he was hay-making on the 20th of June, 1837, Queen Victoria's Coronation Day. Farmer Pinnegar held the fields

then, and at five o'clock in the afternoon the horses were unhitched from the waggons, and all the farm hands trudged off to Swindon to the fête and gala, and afterwards stopped to see the fireworks. Mark was a young lad of eleven then, but he had lively recollections of the "crowndin' affair," and liked to tell you about it from time to time. There was another annual festival he was fond of talking about, too, which has long been abandoned now; that was the autumn fête held upon the top of White Horse Hill at Uffington. There was a brass band and fiddlers, and all kinds of sports. There was walking the tight-rope, climbing the greasy pole for the legs of mutton, catching the porker by the tail, which had been well greased—this was usually effected with the teeth—ploughing-matches, prizes for the best kept harness and team, foot-races, and I do not know what beside. Large crowds of people came from all parts, and Mark had eight miles to walk home at night. It was a favourite sport of ours, years ago, to slide down the steepest part of the hill, a distance of seventy or eighty yards, sitting on the long grass. After a start you obtained a great speed. The grass was very slippery; there was no stopping till you reached the bottom of the slope. The genial author of "Tom Brown's Schooldays" must have performed the feat many times in his juvenile years, on that very slope; it is inconceivable that he should have missed such boisterous fun and amusement as that.

I have said the old folk would be full of wonder if they could suddenly return and see all the marvels we have in our day—the railways and steamships,

electric motors, aeroplanes, and the rest of it, and perhaps this is reasonable enough; but, together with all this, we must not suppose that we have all the brains in our time, and that no one before us ever thought about mechanical power, or means of traction and locomotion. If we had an industrial history of old times written, telling us about the machinery they used, in manufacture, at all events, we should probably learn some very interesting items. As to locomotion, that is another matter; yet what might have been achieved had it not been for the prejudice and ignorance of the old Roman chiefs and emperors! It is commonly supposed, for instance, that Hero of Alexandria discovered steam-power in the first or second century B.C.; and when Vespasian was building a new Forum in Rome, the stone for which was being brought from the hill quarries thirty miles distant, a man came to him one day and told him he had invented a means of mechanical traction, by which he could convey the material to Rome at a very small charge; but though Vespasian was deeply interested and sympathetic, he would not consent to using the process, and forbade the invention to be proceeded with, saying: "I must have work for my poor people." So he gave the inventor a sum of money and quashed the discovery, whatever that may have been. That was always the way of dealing with machinery in those times.

At another time a clever Roman brought a lovely glass casket to the Emperor as a present, and, when in the act of giving it to him, purposely let it drop on the hard pavement. The Emperor cried out

with dismay, thinking it would be smashed to atoms, but the other was quite unmoved. The casket did not break; it squatted. Stooping down, he coolly picked it up, took a little wooden mallet from his pocket, knocked it into shape again, and handed it to the astonished Emperor. He had discovered malleable glass. Here again the invention was unfavourably received, so the secret was lost and has never been rediscovered.

In making the line, all the material obtained from the cuttings was utilized for constructing the embankments, and even this was not sufficient; that is why the large pits were dug alongside the Cole to provide clay and stone for building up the banks there. Sometimes, in wet weather, these give way and slide out; then the line has to be supported with strong walls of stone let in the "batter." Careful watch is kept all the year through for landslides; if these should suddenly occur, you might find the heavy engine and carriages of the next express overturned in the field, and be called upon to mourn a great catastrophe.

Most of the men who work on the railway—platelayers and others—belong to the village. These are somewhat superior to the agricultural population, or at least a few of them—the gangers and signalmen; the labourers can scarcely claim to be better off, except in the matter of hours; they have a little more leisure than the farm-hands, that is all. The platelayers' wages range from sixteen to eighteen shillings a week, and many of the agricultural labourers obtain as much, though they have Sunday

work to perform. There is a gang on the railway to every two and a half miles. Formerly this was of eight men; now it is reduced to six. There was a little more labour required to maintain the old permanent way than is wanted now though. Then the rails were laid longitudinally on single balks, and the metals were packed up with thin pieces of wood. There was rather more displacement of the rails, too, then, and consequently more labour to get them in shape again. The men used to carry a long heavy wooden lever with a rope attached to the end, with which to raise the balk and rail. Every day you could watch this operation from the highway. The iron end of the lever was placed beneath the timber; three or four men hung on the cord and prised it up, while another "packed" it with ballast. The ballast used then was shingle brought from the sea-beach. When the boys wanted a new pebble to play marbles they always went along to the footway across the line to obtain one. Several boys used to lie down between the rails of the track and allow the express trains to fly along above them, and enjoy the excitement of it, but that would not be possible now, or it would be very dangerous, at all events. Now the rails are laid on sleepers placed transversely, and instead of clean, bright pebbles brought from the side of the rippling ocean, you have blackstone, slag, and other dingy-looking material.

Years ago the railway was bordered by two hedges of hawthorn, one each side, which were always beautifully kept, and an ornament to the embankments, but these have almost totally disappeared to-day;

they have been destroyed and wire fences set up in their place. The hedges required cutting every year, which meant labour, and no return; the wire fences do not need this. Appearances do not count with the railway folk; everything must be reduced to the utilitarian standard. Formerly the line through the village was bordered with magnificent beech-trees as well, but these, too, were doomed; in some cases the trees were cut down altogether, in others all the branches were lopped off and the trunks left standing, like dismembered giants; it would have been better to cut them down outright, as they are all dead from the mutilation.

The railway provides a useful time-table for the toilers in the fields, and the good-wife in the cottage as well; the farm-hands, for the most part, count their time according to the running of the fast expresses and the "stoppers." As nearly all the farmers of the place send their milk to the Metropolis, this necessitates a journey to the nearest station once or twice a day. This affords an opportunity for all the milk-boys round about to meet and form acquaintances; great is the fun and many are the games indulged in about the station premises morning and evening.

Watching for the trains and noting the names on the engines is a further interest for at least some of the boys. I remember how long and carefully I used to wait behind the hedge to catch the wonderful names and store them up in my memory. How inexpressibly and mysteriously great some of those titles seemed to be to my boyish mind, even at that

early age — Agamemnon, Hyperion, Prometheus, Ajax, Achilles, Atalanta, Mameluke; they fired my imagination, and filled me with strange feelings of pride and joy. It was years before I came to learn who those lordly personages were—if they really ever were, that is—but I surely and certainly received an intimation of their august greatness at the time I first saw their names as a small boy about the farm, and I doubt not but many others have been similarly interested and affected.

The signalmen are the élite of the village railwaymen. Their wages are better, their work cleaner and brainier—it is genteel by the side of that of the platelayers and farm-hands—but there is great responsibility attaching to the post. Good reliable men only are retained in the signal-boxes, who have been tried and proved, who are unhampered with exterior business, able to concentrate their whole thought and mind on the signals and instruments. One lapse of memory would be sufficient to bring about calamity; they would be ruined as far as their life on the railway is concerned.

Fogs are the dread of the signalmen, as well as of the drivers of trains; it is an anxious time then for the man in the signal-cabin, and the one on the foot-plate, too. As soon as a fog comes on, the signal-cabin in the village is closed, and the operator calls out the fogmen, who place detonators on the line, and signal to the engine-men that way.

The night is long and lonely for the signalman in the winter, and the wilder the weather the greater need there is for him to be on the alert. A short

while ago, just after midnight, the signalman on duty heard a strange and unaccountable noise, as of someone scuffling about outside, and coming slowly up the steps to his doorway. Puzzled for the moment, he opened the door and found a man on his knees halfway up the stairs, with his clothes all torn, and fearfully cut about the head and limbs, and covered with blood. It turned out that the man was a traveller by the midnight mail, who, somehow or other, had mistaken the door of the carriage, and had fallen out of the train going at full speed; it was a wonder he was not killed outright. There was a freight-train due at the time, so the signalman stopped this and got the man aboard, and thence to the hospital at the neighbouring town.

Many flowers grow and thrive along the high steep banks of the railway and in the cuttings. Some are to be found there which you would search for in vain about the rich moist meadows and hedgerows round about. If it were not for these, and the great usefulness of the line to all sorts and conditions of people, I should wish it had never been laid through the village, for I am no great lover of smoke and noise, bustle and confusion; but since the steel rails and engines are indispensable to the conditions under which we live, and the railway banks afford new pleasure and delight in floral matters, I will cheerfully bear with whatever there is of disadvantage about it.

I have mentioned that dog-violets bloom along the embankments. These are very abundant in places, and the sweet violet as well, though this is rarer, and

is chiefly white in colour. The first flower to deck the bare earth or stone of the batter is the pale gold of the coltsfoot. I have gathered this as early as the first week in February. The little Buxbaum's speedwell has been out all the winter through, but this is a continuation from the autumn, while the other is a new birth. The coltsfoot is not general till March or April, then the banks will be almost yellow with it. How pretty and quaint the fluffy seed-heads are after the bloom! They are as beautiful almost as the blossoms themselves. Cowslips grow in great numbers along the embankments, but only on one side of the line—the north side, where the line is raised, and the south slope in the cuttings. It would seem from this that the cowslip, though abundant on dry pastures, cannot endure the strong rays of the sun shining on the line bank. Here the heat is terrific in the summer; everything is soon parched up, while the north and south banks, by sloping from the sun, instead of towards it, are much cooler in consequence. On the other hand, the bright ox-eye daisy, the favourite of so many in town and country, too, revels in the drought of the embankment; the slopes are almost white with it for weeks together.

After the coltsfoot come others of the composite order—the golden dandelion, cat's-ear, and, though not so frequent, the goat's-beard. This latter, like the daisy, shuts its eye at noon, and takes a nap till the evening in sunny weather, and the autumnal hawkbit, another of the order, does the same. This seems to be quite a peculiarity of the composite kinds. The meadow crane's-bill abounds along the

bases of the slope, and the dove's-foot crane's-bill, too, with its tiny blood-red blossom. Here also are the rich spikes of the yellow rocket, and small melilot, cinquefoil, bed-straw, land-cress, and large panicles of pink and white milfoil, or yarrow, wild carrot, mignonette, bladder campion, vetch, and abundant ragwort in summer. Toad-flax is frequent, too, though not altogether common; and little Maggie, one of the school-children I had deputed to collect the little florets for me, delighted me last year by bringing several clusters of the daintily sweet wild-pea, which, she told me, with some excitement, she had plucked on the railway-bank close to the wall of the arch, and which I afterwards verified. This flower is rare in this locality; it was the first I had seen; the plants, where they exist, do not bloom at all freely, and I watched in vain for further blossoms.

There was another rarity discovered on the bank, lurking in the stones and short bushes, some few years ago. This was an adder. How it came to be there was a mystery; for though they are known to exist in the woods farther down towards Andover and Salisbury, I have never heard of one being found anywhere in or near the village either before or since. The line men who discovered it were not very kindly disposed towards it, and promptly killed it; it was one of the undesirables from their point of view.

The Priory Farm, a large stone house and buildings, stands immediately by the railway, alongside the cutting. This was formerly occupied by a small gentleman farmer of very limited means and scarcely any practical knowledge of agriculture, though at the

time I worked for him—this was my first place after leaving school—he was possessed of a fair stock of cattle, and a vast herd of pigs. These he allowed to run everywhere—over garden, lawn, flower-beds, roads, fields, and all places beside, at their pleasure: they were very often lost for weeks together, especially in the autumn, when they decamped to the far-off coverts in search of acorns. On their discovery, well fattened up, they were promptly converted into bacon. The old sows were very artful, and knew their way about well enough, and could open all the gates, if they were not securely chained. They caused great mischief with their snouts, ploughing up considerable patches of turf, and ravaging everywhere. One day the farmer brought home a large bucketful of horse-fat for greasing the cart-wheels, and, happening to leave it a moment, an old sow came along and swallowed the lot in about half-a-dozen gulps: it is amazing what a quantity of filth they eat. Epicurus, or else Cicero, used to say he should think life was given to the hog only to keep it from putrefying; though, considering what a universal article of food it has become in our day, as formerly, perhaps the remark was a little unmerited and hard on the poor swine. I am sure a great many of the villagers would not share that opinion, for they almost worship the denizen of the sty, and especially rejoice in its immolation. The farmer sold me a little pig for 5s., which I carried home in a sack over my shoulder, and which my mother cared for and fatted up.

My master was a young man, under thirty, fond of balls and parties, and a member of the Yeomanry—

a good, easy-going fellow, but doomed to certain failure, and almost to a state of absolute want. He was lacking in all those qualities which go to make the successful farmer—shrewdness, caution, hard-headedness, sound judgment, and business faculty. In the first place he was a late riser—that alone spells failure in agriculture. "Early to bed, and early to rise," is the invariable rule in successful farm-houses. You must be up with the lark to keep pace with things. There are the cows to be milked at an early hour, and the churns to be got away to the railway-station, or the milk attended to in the dairy; after that the cattle must be fed and watered—in winter at least—or the teams must be got off to plough or drill, mowing or reaping, whatever there is to be done about the fields: it is useless to lie in bed dozing and dreaming after the sun is once well up above the hills in the south.

Farmer Chaplin generally thrust his head out of the bedroom window towards eight o'clock, and shouted loudly across the yard for me to have his boots cleaned, or to go and drive the pigs out of the garden, or "tell Harry to put the horse in the trap," and have it ready by such and such a time. After breakfast, if he did not otherwise go out, he sauntered round, with spotless white shirt, and threw maize about for the poultry, or he might perchance put on a smock and help feed the pigs, but at best he did not do very much. We used to boil up Indian corn grist in vast quantities for the pigs, and any amount of horse-flesh as well. This seemed a most unnatural thing to me, and I did not like it, but they laughed

and said it was "good stuff, just the sort to make them fat." Another practice, which I thought most foul and horrible, was to lodge great pieces of raw horse-flesh in the boughs of the apple-trees about the orchard, and let them rot there. This was to provide choice morsels for the hens. The putrefying flesh was soon full of gentils: the hens flocked round, and devoured these with great avidity. People said it "made them lay well." Perhaps it did, though I would not have eaten eggs produced from such a diet if I had known anything about it. It is only fair to say, out of respect for those whom I know to be particularly fond of eggs obtained in the village, that the practice is quite obsolete now, in these parts, at all events.

We received our wages fortnightly, which was productive of great complaining in my workmate, and then very often master was "out of cash," or "had no change"; sometimes it was a month before we could be settled with. So one day my companion tackled him on the point. "Sir," said he, "do you know how we sort of people live?" The master looked surprised for a moment, and then responded with, "N-o! Not hardly." There are many who do "not hardly" know how the poor workpeople live. Many there are, too, who do not care; but not all are alike. After this, the master paid us our wages weekly, for he understood then. My hebdomadal earnings were three shillings. Out of this my mother gave me threepence every week, which I saved. The first thing I bought from my savings was a telescope for eighteen shillings; with this I wanted to view

the hills, for I had never been upon them at that time.

Perhaps the chief factor in my young master's ruin was his friendship with a farmer who lived in the fields not very far away. This latter was a gamester, a fast liver, and a dangerous customer at all times; one who smoked all cigars, drank whisky, and spent half and very often the entire night in card-playing. Such an intimacy was bound to be productive of ill-results in one so young and inexperienced; very soon you could perceive something had gone awry. After losing heavily in money the stock began to dwindle; first a pig was driven off to the other's premises, then two; by-and-by the farm implements went as well; now a horse-rake, at this time a nearly new cart; finally it came to horse-flesh; and one of the very best mares was taken off to pay a debt. After I had worked with him about a year he left the farm and soon came to the ground. The last I heard of him was that he was fulfilling the office of cowman, at a farm away up over the downs, which is distressing to learn. Happily for agriculture, gambling is not very frequent among the yeoman class; wherever it exists there is a depreciation in the management and general conduct of the farm. He who would thrive well and save a pile quickly, must needs shun the card-pack, the whisky, and the habitual cigar; an honest pipe, a draught of plain ale, and an early ascent of the farm staircase, will be the better course for him to take.

The old canal runs parallel with the railway throughout the village. This is in disuse now. It

was made some twenty years before the line, and was formerly crowded with traffic, chiefly corn, coal, stone, and timber. Even after the railway was constructed it continued to be utilized down to a dozen years ago. That was before the pace became so hot; patience was a common quality then; as far as commerce goes it is extinct now. Of course, conveyance by water was cheaper; but in these days of extreme hurry and bustle, time is the chief consideration, and that is highly valuable. If you should save 25 per cent. on carriage, and lose the market on arrival, what would you profit? Now, even the freight trains have to run at express speed. No one will wait. Water is too tardy. We have seen this in the case of the mill. Even steam is going out of favour. That is lagging, too. Nothing less than the flash of electricity will serve the future. The past crept along, the present runs smartly, the future will have to fly. It is said there may yet be a recurrence to canals as a means of transit. Possibly so, though the outlook is far from encouraging to those who hold shares in these concerns. The wish is father to the thought, perhaps. After all, it will not matter very much. It is the same with canals everywhere. Even the fine waterway that passes through Devizes and Savernake is out of use now, though the locks and bridges are good. Here everything is old and ruined and useless. In a few years the bed will be quite full of mud and earth, and level with the meadows.

Canals are very old institutions, and very new ones, too, according to some very learned scientists. They played an important part in classic times, in

the Eastern Empires round about Babylon and the Euphrates—they were the διῶρυχες of old times—they have served their turn down to this generation, and they have found a place on the planet Mars! Perhaps you think it an easy matter to construct a canal. You imagine, doubtless, it is only to cleave the channel and turn the water in, then heave ho! swim barge, all right away! It is not so simply effected. The first difficulty would be in containing your water; you would require a little ocean to keep the channel full, for it would soak into the earth and drain away. To prevent this you require a bed, such as every wise farmer lays at the bottom of his ponds about the farm which are not sunk in clay. First of all is a layer of straw, two feet deep, then two or three feet of good clay, to which lime may be added, the whole well laid down. This is water-tight, but it entails a large amount of labour at the outset, though it is not so expensive as laying steel rails. Then there is provision for inequality of ground. This is overcome by the construction of locks. There are four sets of these through the village. The spaces between are called "pounds." A lock is about twenty-five yards long, just big enough to contain a barge. If you were going downstream, you entered the full lock, then the gate was shut, and the water emptied; you sank with it and came to the other level. If you were journeying uphill, your barge entered the lock at normal, the gate was shut behind you, and the water roared in at the other end; you rose with it, of course. The old walls and gates of the locks are very dilapidated now; the pounds are dry, the whole

is half-filled with a mass of gross vegetation; the smell is not pleasant.

Years ago there were many teams plying up and down the tow-path. These passed along at all times of the day and night, Sundays as well. Some of the barges were drawn by horses, some by mules, and some by donkeys. The pace of the latter was very slow; they could not have gone more than two miles an hour. The boatman and his family lived aboard. The good-wife plied the tiller; the youngsters poked their bare heads out of the hatchway, or ran along the deck with naked feet. There were many wooden bridges over the canal, swing-bridges they are called. The driver crossed over and raised them for the barge to pass, then let them down again. These are all to pieces now. A steam traction engine, in trying to cross one near by just recently, fell through into the bed of the canal. The woodwork is old and decayed; they have stood for nearly a century.

Formerly the waters of the canal abounded in fish. There were few weeds then. The steam dredger worked away every year, and kept the middle clear; the lock-keeper attended to the sides, and cleaned the obstructions out with a heavy iron rake. He caught many fish by this means, especially tench, which lie near the bottom. The chief fish beside tench were roach, perch, pike, carp, and eels. These latter are caught with night-lines. A dead bait is set, weighted to the bottom overnight; if an eel should chance that way, it might find the morsel and be caught. I have been up as early as 2 a.m. to attend to the lines. Very often the men used to attach nets

to the stern of their barges, projecting each side. As the barge floated forward the water swam back, and the fish with it; it was an easy matter to take a large quantity by this method. Very often the canal was netted by farmers occupying the meadows each side, and sometimes it was poached. A common way of taking fish was to empty the pounds. Here you procured an iron bar, and prised the paddle-doors up a little, sufficiently to drain the water out, but not high enough for the big fish to escape. This operation took several hours; but when the water became low you could be sure of a good haul of fish from the paddle-holes.

Beside traffic in corn and minerals, there were pleasure craft as well — steamboats, canoes, and sailers; and every year the children from the neighbouring village were conveyed to Uffington in barges, on their way to White Horse Hill for the annual school-treat. How pleasant it was to glide along through the sweet green fields, away from the noise and dust of the highway! These started betimes in the morning, and returned late; drawn by strong horses, they easily covered four miles an hour. All the boats paid their fees at the lock-house. In the winter, when the canal was frozen, hundreds of skaters passed through the village; now it is deserted. There are only patches of water, and seldom any ice of late years, for the seasons have been remarkably mild; Jack Frost seems to have betaken himself off to Lapland, or elsewhere. In the severe frosts of 1891 I crossed the ice to work at the farm every day for seven consecutive weeks.

Old John Ferris lived at the lock-house at that time. It was his duty to superintend the locks, and receive the tolls, to see that everything was in good repair—this he performed himself, both helping to build up the walls, and replacing the heavy timbers—to clip the hedges, mow the grass on the tow-path, drag the canal for weeds, and regulate the water by hatches in the feeders. This came from the reservoir at Coate, which belongs to the canal authorities. The old man had three sons: Shadrach, Meshach, and Frank. His only daughter's name was Phœbe. Here you have a contrast in names: the Biblical, and the Pagan or Classical. The taste for Biblical names is on the wane nowadays: Moses, Aaron, Absalom, Jacob, Isaac, Solomon, are seldom met with in the boys; or Martha, Mary, or Ruth, even, in the girls. Instead you hear Algernon, Reginald, Percival, Sutheran, Cecil in the males; in the girls, Gwendoline, Geraldine, Gladys, Phyllis, and so on. If the present hurry continues to increase, and the long string of Christian names with it, there will be no time to write, or even to speak them. In the manufactory, where a boy or man possesses a lengthy cognomen, he is never addressed by it, never; instead, he is called Jack, or Jim, or is otherwise presented with a short, pithy nickname, often more expressive than polite.

Of the old lock-keeper's sons, two helped their father with his duties, and the third, Shadrach, was blind; but, as is so often the case, where Nature has withheld one gift, she has bestowed others even more wonderful; and here, though she had refused sight,

she had compensated the loss by the addition of a remarkable taste for and skill in mechanics. Accordingly the blind man had a lathe and benches fitted up in the workshop; here he did wood-turning and carpentering, and all kinds of repairs to agricultural machinery. When the old man removed to the town to live, the blind son attended the schools and studied electricity with great success, and has been for some years engaged as a practical electrician, working quite independently, and going about unattended. Evil days fell on the old lock-keeper and his wife; in the end they had to repair to the workhouse, and there they both died.

Henry Hawkins next took over the canal works. His occupation of the lock-house was very unfortunate for him; it is a dangerous place to reside where there are children, and his family was six in number, half girls and half boys. One day his eldest son fell in the lock and was drowned, and a year or so afterwards his next son in age did likewise. The warden of the waters was beside himself with grief; he was looking forward to the time when his boys could help him, for he wanted to take a small farm, and now here he was, bereft of two fine children by an unhappy accident; his bright hopes of a prosperous future were dashed to the ground. The old fiddle was cast aside; there was no music heard in the house for a long time afterwards. His poor wife was very unhappy, too, for it was said that Henry blamed her for not being careful enough with the children; but who can be responsible for young boys? You never know what they will be up to. It was even whispered, further-

more, that he was so vexed with her he would not sleep with her for a long time, which, among the villagers, is considered the harshest and severest punishment a man can inflict on the wife of his bosom. By-and-by, however, the clouds passed by —time is a wonderful healer of sorrows—the sky became brighter; Henry was able to take a small farm after all. His daughter Cissy's young man went with him and supplied the place of a son. If they fail to make a living it will not be for the want of hard labour and industriousness. For my part, I wish them every success in their new life. Good luck to them many times, I say. Hearty good luck to them all!

Since the old canal has fallen on evil days there is not a penny spent in its maintenance, or not more than is absolutely necessary, at least, to keep the bridges open for traffic, and to safeguard life and limb. The walls of the locks are tumbling down; the old swing-bridges are demolished; there are no fish at all to be found. Their place has been occupied by weeds, wild plants, grasses and flowers; it is a rich and varied field for the botanist, and even those who are not skilled in the science may derive considerable pleasure and interest from a walk along the deserted tow-path, and an inspection of the masses of vegetation there.

Nearly all the flowers grow along the margin, or within easy reach of the bank; tall grasses and flags fill the middle parts. Here you may gather the beautiful yellow iris, water-violet, the exquisite flowering rush, the rosy blooms of the arrow-head, broad-

leaved plantain, the dull-coloured and curious water-figwort, tall parsnip, and pretty minute marsh goose-grass, similar to that which grows under conditions so entirely different away upon the slopes of Charlbury Hill, over opposite you in the south yonder. In addition to these, there are the hemp-nettle, meadow-sweet, the little white gipsy-wort—like a miniature dead nettle—the rarer purple of the skull-cap—which alone is worth half the produce ever conveyed along the waterway—and equally rare, the tiny and unique celery-leaved crowfoot, with its quaint seed capsule. Along the bank of the tow-path I have gathered ox-tongue and St. John's-wort, too; and farther away, near the town, sneeze-wort as well. So, if one interest has passed away, there is a dearer and more beautiful one surviving, for the present, at any rate. The barges are gone; the trade of the canal has gone, too; it has been superseded by its powerful competitor, the railway, near at hand; man has left the field and Nature has taken possession of it again. I have spent many happy hours fishing in the locks, or beneath the old oak plantation, but that is all gone now; nevertheless, I derive even greater pleasure from the grasses and flowers which have sprung up along the banks and in the bed of the deserted old waterway.

CHAPTER XII

Decline of village sports—The old club festival—Highworth Fair — Hiring — Cherry Feast — Valentine's Day — The "rough band"—Bonfire night—Mumming—An old-time snake hunt—Quoits—Miscellaneous games—The village parliament—Election time—Births, marriages, and deaths.

It is remarkable that while the passion for excitement and amusement is increasing in the towns, in the villages it is on the wane, and visibly diminishing. The age seems to have outgrown the old temper. Simple sports and pastimes, even in the villages, do not please now as formerly. There is also "respectability" to be counted with, which turns up its nose at the old-time games and festivals, and hurries off to mix with the fine crowd about the streets, at the football-match, the cinematograph, and the theatre. The village fair and club festival were condemned because simple people assembled together to indulge in simple amusements. The sight of so many "poor foolish" peasant folk thronging the streets: the Henries, and Thomases, and Georges, the Emmas and Mary Anns, laughing immoderately at the antics of a fifth-rate clown, or gaping at the Punch and Judy show, or dancing together around the old fiddler sitting on the ground, or throwing at the "knock 'em downs," or bowling

at the "milky cocoa-nuts," was an offence to those who affected a superiority of taste and were possessed with means of indulging it. They did not like the noise or the crowd; they said it was hateful and abominable, pure barbarism; it was time it was put a stop to; they could see all manner of evil in it, it was nothing but a "drunken, rowdy show," a public pest, and a nuisance. So, in time, from one cause and another, the old sports fell away; this was prohibited, and that was prohibited; a standing was refused here, and something else objected to there; at any rate, extinction was aimed at, and almost effected; a great many of the villages are silent all the year through together at this time; though I cannot for the life of me see that any good has been done by it. That anyone is better off by the change materially, is hard to realize; they are certainly not more religious, moral, sober, honest, or industrious either; though very likely some of them are become more prosaic, long-faced, moody, and dull as a consequence. The old sports and festivals used to brighten up the year for farm-people, and if they were rude and simple, noisy and boisterous, they served their purpose very well, and were always hailed with unfeigned joy and delight.

What a day the old club anniversary used to be in the village years ago, before the little society became enfeebled and crippled by other more powerful and national institutions! It was quite the event of the year; Christmas and Easter were nothing to it; it was, in truth, the red-letter day of all, young and old alike. There were about thirty members in

the society altogether. These contributed a certain amount per month for sickness, and the club "broke up" every five years; that is to say, the accumulated moneys were shared out to the members, only retaining a sum for present needs. The anniversary was held on the second Tuesday in May. This comprised a general assembly at the inn—the headquarters of the club—a general procession to church, headed by a brass band in the morning, and afterwards a parade of the village, with music and collections for the society's funds, at the manor, the farms, and houses *en route*. At one o'clock all sat down to a substantial hot dinner of roast beef, and other cooked meats and vegetables, provided in the club-room; the band played selections; the foaming ale was brought in in large two-gallon cans; the greatest good-nature prevailed. Farmers and all belonged to the gathering; it was no one-sided affair, and a great number of folk attended from the neighbouring villages; all the old people made it their business to come to "Maason Club." The procession was headed by three men bearing blue silk flags with tassels and fringes, a large one first, and two smaller ones, one on each side. The members wore regalia, red and blue sashes and rosettes, and walked with blue staffs with gilt heads.

Jemmy Boulton always carried the big flag. He wore a stout leather belt, with socket in front; the flag-staff fitted into this; if there was a breeze he needed all his strength to maintain it. He was just in his element then; you may imagine how his eyes twinkled with pleasure, and what delight he felt.

His old face was redder than ever; his smile was ineffable. How very proud he was of that fringed and tasselled silk! If the wind blew he kept it upright and rigid; if it was calm he waved it about from side to side, and when the crowd was stationary before the farms, or near the club-room, he waved it so low as to touch the people's heads.

On club days the whole street of the village was thronged with people and traffic; the stalls and booths, shooting-galleries, swings and cocoa-nuts, were so numerous that oftentimes their owners had to retire altogether for want of space, or otherwise pitch in an unprofitable spot away from the centre. There was generally a Punch and Judy show, with the "original dog Toby," and once a man brought a small menagerie with a "Rooshan" bear and a gorilla. The "show" consisted of a drama, a very crude affair, illustrated by means of shadows thrown on a sheet from behind, a sort of cinematograph entertainment, the charge to see which was one penny.

Nearly all the villages round about had their clubs in those days, and some were quite famous locally, especially those of Watchfield, Bishopstone, and Wanborough, but they have dwindled now, or else disappeared altogether. Rural fêtes and all are going out of fashion. We have seen there was formerly one held on White Horse Hill, but that was many years ago. People now do not seem to have energy enough to organize sports on the old lines; and even if you should do so, no one will attend to see them. Whatever the cause of it may

be, the fact remains; country-folk are certainly not as keen on hearty amusement as heretofore.

Another event of importance was Highworth Michaelmas Fair. This used to be a great muster; vast crowds flocked in from all the villages round; the town was quite full of sight-seers, especially in in the evening—carters and carter-boys, cowmen and shepherds, with their wives and families; old and young, children and grey-beards together. All through the harvest-time the mothers used to admonish their children to "behave yourselves, mind, and buck in to the rippin' and pickin', else you shan't go to Highwuth Fair." We needed no other spur than this to incite us on to the task; it would have been a great punishment to very many to have been left behind at such a time as that. I remember my first visit to the fair. We had been acorning in the fields all the morning. My mother said if we could pick up a bushel we should all go after dinner. Highworth is three miles from the village. We used to gather acorns and sell them at a shilling a bushel for fattening pigs. So, in the afternoon, we walked through the fields to the town. The fair was held in the market-place; but the whole of the principal streets were packed with booths and shows, swings, roundabouts, and other means of amusement; you could scarcely move for the crowds of people. Here were exhibitions of all kinds—of beast and birds, waxwork figures, model machinery, glass-making, cotton-spinning, picture-galleries, and all sorts of things beside. We could not afford to see everything, but my mother took us into the wax-

works show, and also to see the cotton-spinning. A great Zulu and several negroes performed the war-dance outside the former of these places, and a man blew loud blasts and fanfares with a trumpet, and invited the people to "walk up and see the great Napoleon Bonnypart, the 'Dook' of Wellington, and other celebrities, very lifelike and natteral." In the evening, though very small, I stole away from my mother and companions, and made tracks for home alone in the darkness; I did not appreciate the hub-bub and confusion of the fair.

All the men and boys who went to be hired wore whip-cord in their coats or hats; by this the farmers knew they were in search of a situation, and accosted them, and engaged them on the spot. I only went to the fair once to be hired, and then I was unsuccessful, as it was past noon when I got there, and all the hiring was over by midday; if you were later than this hour, you stood precious little chance of obtaining a situation. When the farmer wanted a man—these used to stand in a line along the edge of the pathway displaying their badges of whip-cord—he walked down the street, eyeing them all up and down till he saw one that pleased him: then he went up to him and asked him a series of questions—where he had worked, and for how long, whether he was married, the number and age of his children, and what he expected to receive in wages. If the answers were satisfactory, he offered the man a shilling; if the other accepted it the bargain was considered as made: there was no setting the bond aside afterwards. There is very little hiring done

nowadays in this locality; the farmers generally advertise in the newspapers, or meet with the men on market-days, and make the necessary arrangements; and as for the fair, that is very nearly at an end. Happening to be in the town one evening a year ago, and seeing a small crowd of people in the market-place, I asked the meaning of it, and was told, very unceremoniously, that it was "Highworth Fair," but it was very unlike that I had attended when a boy with my mother.

Cherry Feast Sunday is still observed by a majority of the villagers, though there is less interest taken in it than formerly. Daniel Lewis's wife Elizabeth, who lived at the little shop, was always the foremost in observing the festival in their more fortunate years. Then she always celebrated it with an extra specially good dinner, consisting of a whole leg of mutton boiled, green peas—the *petits pois* of the menu—and new *pommes de terre*—young potatoes—fresh from the garden, ending up with a choice rich "Feast" pudding, made like those which smoke on the tables at Christmas. It was usual for Elizabeth to be down with dyspepsia the week following Feast Sunday, but that was a small price to pay for the pleasure of keeping up the festival. On Feast Sundays the church itself is generally empty, or in the evening, at all events. The majority of the villagers betake them to the vicinity of the inn, where the "Feast" is held, and buy the rich, red cherries, washing them down with ale or ginger-pop, and see no harm in the matter. The warden of the law is at hand to keep order, and preserve the peace.

Everything passes off smoothly; the next day labour proceeds as before.

These village festivals served at least one good purpose, that of bringing folk together, and promoting friendliness and sociability; many a rustic met old friends there whom he had not seen since the last Club, or Feast Day. "Mind you comes awver to feast, look ee; we shall expect to see ya then, ya know, missus an' all an ee. We can gie ee a bite an a soop o summat or nother." Those who live at a distance borrow a horse and trap from maaster and drive over; they will be sure not to miss the invitation.

Valentine's Day is scarcely observed at all in the village now, not even by the juveniles, who always used to take advantage of the occasion to play pranks, and score off competitors and rivals in love and courtship, and other matters; while the sentimental valentine is seldom heard of at all. Almost the only ones obtainable in the town now are coarse caricatures, chiefly vulgar in allusion; you cannot indulge in a jest even with any refinement. Cheap comic post-cards have taken the place of the old-time valentine to a large extent, many of which are quite indecent, and not fit to be exhibited at all. Most of the young men and women, and boys and girls as well, crowd round the windows to see the latest "novelties." That is one of the modern means of educating the rising generation.

The interest in All Fools' Day is waning, too, and that of "Chick-Chack" Day as well. In regard to the former of these, it was permissible to make one

a fool only in relation to the probable, by calling attention to something or other, which, though fictitious, was only mildly so, and never grossly inaccurate. Thus, if you told a very deliberate falsehood, or called one to see something which, in the nature of things, was quite preposterous, though you befooled the victim, you had not legitimately scored. A witty jest was the most successful, and was always admitted. When you had prevailed upon the victim to come and see something or other surprising, or had sent him on a ridiculous errand, or had startled him into some sudden belief or other, you cried out, "Oh, you April fool!" and the matter ended. All this was permissible till noon; if you attempted to perpetrate a jest after that hour, you yourself were considered the fool.

"Chick-Chack" Day fell on May 29, and it was incumbent on all the farm-boys to wear "chick-chack" in their button-holes, or pinned on to their caps. There were three kinds of "chick-chack" to be worn—young maple-leaves, ash, and oak. Very often, however, oak was not to be had, for that is late in expanding into leaf, but you must be equipped with the other kinds; it was a dishonour to farm-boys to be without the emblem. If one wearing "chick-chack" encountered another without it, he accosted him with an old rhyme:

> "Chick-chack, powder monkey,
> You're the biggest fool all round the country."

A few boys of the village still keep up the old custom.

The "rough band" is another diversion of the village youth, though men and all used to take part in it years ago. This was intended as a punishment for such as had been guilty of immorality, especially in the case of wedded people. When any such offence had been committed, a large body of young men assembled in the evening, provided with old pots and pans, anything and everything that would emit a loud noise, and stout sticks to beat them with. Then they marched in procession to the houses of the offending parties, and made as much noise as possible, keeping up the nuisance for several hours, if they were not set upon by the enraged victims, and severely handled, which was sometimes the case. This kind of entertainment lasted for five nights. Sometimes the law was required to intervene by the offending parties, but they seldom obtained much sympathy from the man in blue. He came over as a matter of course, and watched the proceedings, but seldom interfered in it.

It will be superfluous to say that the fifth of November was most enthusiastically observed by all and sundry in the village, and is far from being obsolete now. Perhaps Guy Fawkes' Day will never be allowed to pass quite unheeded, for, though the adult and middle-aged are indifferent to the appeal for celebrating the discovery of the old-time plot, the juveniles are not likely to be deprived of their sports and bonfire. When we went to school all the children collected twigs and bushes for the fire, beginning several weeks before the "fifth." These we stowed in a heap on the roadside, where the fire was had;

no one ever interfered with us, though it would never be permitted nowadays. A great many of the farmers used to have a fire as well, in their grounds, which was usually a private affair. Farmer Ody used to collect a large pile of bushes, hedge-croppings, and other thorny substance, and crown the whole with a tar-barrel. On the evening of the "fifth" he invited Henry Love and others to come and drink a glass of whisky with him, and view the sport. The children from the cottages came to see the fire. Henry Love laughed as well as any, but used to think it a pity to burn so many good bushes; he thought they would have made capital beds for ricks. The beds of hay and corn-ricks are generally made with a good layer of bushes or faggots, with a little rough straw or old thatch on top.

A short while before Christmas preparations were made for mumming. There were half a dozen or more performers required to make the company. These dressed up in costumes and wore masks. One was King George, another was the doctor; beside these there were represented the Prince, Slasher, a fool, and the devil. First of all the players went to a house and asked if they would like to see the mummers play. If the occupants were agreeable, the mumming proceeded. The fool entered first and craved room for the players:

"Room, room, good people, give us room to sport,
For to this room we wish now to resort;
Resort and repeat to you our merry rhyme,
For remember, good sirs, this is Christmas-time.
The time to cut up goose-pies now doth appear,
So we are come to act a little of our merry Christmas here."

After this request, King George and Slasher came in and fought, and then the doctor was summoned:

"Doctor, doctor, where bist thee?
King George is wounded in the knee."

Hereupon the doctor came in, who could cure

"The itch, the pitch, the palsy, or the gout;
If a man got nineteen devils in him, I'll cast twenty out.
Here, drink out of my bottle,
And let it run down thy throttle;
If thou be not quite slain,
Rise up and fight again."

After this others entered and fought with swords, and last of all the devil came.

"In come I, little Devil Doubt,
If you don't give me money, I'll sweep you all out.
Money I want, money I crave;
If you don't give me money, I'll sweep you all to the grave."

There was also a party of mummers who came from St. Margaret, and who were better taught than those of the village. Sometimes these came in contact at the farm-houses, but, though they were very jealous of each other, there was no unpleasantness. I can remember when rival youthful factions of the villages did meet and fight each other though, and set out with that intention, but that is past now. Perhaps that is something to congratulate ourselves upon, though it is often forced home to me that our boys are becoming remarkably deficient in spirit, and the quality called pluck. If higher civilization is better in many respects, it has this disadvantage: it tends to quell and extinguish temper in the individual, that divine spark which is the most useful ingredient

of all nature and character, and which has played such a great part in the world's history.

Besides the games indulged in by the juveniles, there are others which belong to those of a slightly advanced age. Of course there are cricket and football. The latter of these is a very old game, well-known in classic times, though not as it is played to-day. Cæsar Augustus played football, as we learn from Suetonius, but it had not attained to such a crazy popularity as at present, though, if the Romans were deficient here, they made up for it in their worship of more brutal sports still, in the circus and gladiatorial games. The slaughter of wild animals at the shows of the Emperors was wicked and appalling, but the Romans were a most cruel people, both in regard to human kind and brute nature, too. At some of these shows, which lasted for several days, there were no less than nine thousand wild beasts slain, chiefly elephants, lions, and panthers, with many other kinds.

There is an interesting account in Diodorus Siculus of the capture of a huge serpent by the ancient people of Numidia. This animal was wanted alive to be sent as a present to King Ptolemy. The lurking-place of the beast was well known. This was a cave in the hills. At certain times of the day it came out to obtain food and then went back to sleep. It was said to be forty-five feet long. At first the natives tried to take it with gins and chains, but drawing near with the gin, they became frightened and cast it on the reptile's tail, where it snapped up, but did not hurt the beast. Hereupon the animal rose in a

fury, and gobbled up two of the hunters in a jiffy. After that they were more cautious, and contrived some other means of taking it. They now made a great net of strong rushes and fibre, and watched for the beast to leave its den. When it came out they blocked up the entrance and dug another hole close by, fitting the net inside; then sought out the animal, and with a vast crowd, and shouting and beating on their arms and shields, drove it towards the hole. As soon as it was inside they darted up and closed the net, and had it secure. It was conveyed to Alexandria on rollers—not a very congenial mode of travel for the poor monster! Here the King received it and afterwards tamed it, and exhibited it in the "Zoo." That was the first great serpent taken alive of which history is aware.

Besides cricket and football, there used to be quoits, which is not quite as popular just at present, though perhaps it will revive again, for that is a very old game as well, and was played in classic times. Then it was the *discus*. But who has not heard the story of Hyacinthus, and how we owe the beautiful flower of that name to the quoit? Hyacinthus was a beautiful boy loved by Zephyrus and Apollo in very old times. Apollo was a god, and Zephyrus was the west wind. Hyacinthus loved Apollo but disregarded the other. Apollo was entrusted with the young lad's education. So one day, when they were playing quoits, out of jealousy, Zephyrus blew hard and turned the quoit upon Hyacinthus' head, and killed him. But that was not the end of the boy. Apollo was so disconsolate at his loss that he

changed his blood into a beautiful purple flower, and gave it the boy's name, the hyacinthus. The children here call these bluebells. Great numbers of them grow in the woods at Hodson, Ashdown, and White Horse Hill. In the spring I see the boys and girls bringing them home in armfuls, as happy as can be, and as proud as peacocks.

> "Beautiful as the wild blue hyacinth,
> Whose purple flower runs ravishingly over the ground,"

Sappho says: and we owe all this beauty to the quoit. Some villages still have their quoit-clubs now, though not in these parts.

"Huddle-duck" is another old-fashioned rustic game. This is played with flat stones. One large stone is placed on the ground, and the others are set on top of it; you are required to cast your stone and knock the "duck" off. If you fail to do this you must throw your own stone back to the line, poised on the toe; or, if you take up the stone in the hand, and are caught with it, you must become "duck." This game was very popular in the village when I was a boy. Then there was the game called "Row, row, rad-i-o." To play this one had to stoop down with his head leaning against a post or wall, and the others stood round, with their hands placed on his back. Then someone removed his hand and held up several fingers, at the same time crying "Buck, buck, buck, how many fingers do I hold up?" and this was continued all round. If the one stooping down guessed correctly the two changed places; if incorrectly, all the others beat upon his back with their

clenched fists, crying out, "Row, row, rad-i-o; row, row, rad-i-o," for several minutes.

Besides tree-climbing and brook-jumping, there is fox-hunting as well. This is played by schoolboys and farm-boys too. One of the swiftest runners is chosen for reynard, and allowed a start, fifteen or twenty follow in hot pursuit, all around the meadows, over the brooks, and everywhere, till, puffing and panting, and unable to run a yard farther, the fox is taken. Then, if it is dry and warm enough, they all lie down under the trees, or strip the bark of the young ash or sycamore, and make whistles or pop-guns from elder, or make cowslip-balls, or plait rushes into whips, or climb up the trees to the rooks' nests, and get into trouble that way, or fall into other mischief; for the boys of the country-side are not more dull than those of the towns, only their amusements are simpler and ruder, more boisterous and vigorous, robust and hearty.

The village has its small parliament, which, if not as august as that of Westminster, is almost as important, in its own estimation; it is a very grave and solemn assembly. This is elected once in three years, and at such times there is quite a commotion in the place; there is often considerable rivalry among the inhabitants to obtain a seat on the Parish Council. This body meets once a month, and gravely discusses matters of urgent importance, and afterwards prints all its motions and doings in the public press. Here, if you really have the affairs of the country at heart, you may read how many of the allotment-holders paid their rent last quarter, and all the minutiæ

beside. At one time a new step has been fixed to the stile in the field, at another a hand-rail has been added to the small bridge across the stream. This farmer is served with a severe notice commanding him to crop the hedge on the roadside forthwith; that one is called upon to take up a drock, and so on—all which is set in type, and the account eagerly and soberly perused by many of the villagers. Whether it be a little matter or not, it is of great moment to them, especially if their name should, by any chance, happen to get mentioned and honoured with print.

When a real election comes round—that is, a Parliamentary one, then you may see a little more excitement, though not nearly as much as is exhibited in the towns, and not nearly as much as was shown in country places formerly, either. We have all heard and read of the riotous scenes which used to take place in the district, years ago, at Cricklade, and Wootton Bassett, but times have changed since then. Nowadays, elections, as a rule, are very well-ordered things. The farm-labourers proper, though they take a deep and active interest in political matters, and may feel strongly on questions of the hour, seldom or never exhibit such enthusiasm and hysteria as you meet with in the towns at such times. There the excitement is most intense; the very air is electrified with it.

It is a very common error to imagine that the villagers all follow the squire and parson in political matters, and vote on their side at the poll. That they certainly do not, and as for intimidating them,

you might as well try to shift the church tower. "I dwunt keer for you, maaster, nor no other man; I allus voted for who I was a mint to, an I be gwain to this time. I dwun want yer vittals an' beer." Old Jemmy Boulton, and Dudley, and Jacky Bridges were all on the popular side, heartily and wholesomely independent in principle. At election times Jemmy was doggedly firm and unshaken by whomsoever solicited. "I'm a yalla, I be. I never did vote blue, an' never wunt neither. I'd soodner die fust." Tom Chamberlain, the Crimean veteran, inclined to the other side—a great many ex-soldiers are Conservative in politics—and used to argue long and seriously with the others, but to no purpose. On the day of the poll they all pinned up their colours in monster rosettes, with streaming ribbons attached, and marched proudly and defiantly to the station to record the vote; and afterwards talked over the chances of the rival candidates, sitting at the inn, with a cup or two of fourpenny. Where you do get a heckler at village political meetings, he will generally prove a trouble to the speaker, and equal to anything you can meet with in the towns.

When a birth takes place in a village, news of it is quickly passed from house to house; everyone in the parish is soon made aware of the circumstance; it is quite a public event. "What is it; a bwoy or a girrul?" is the first question asked; and afterwards, "Wha's ee's name gwain to be?" In due time the infant is baptized, often in the middle of a service. If it is a first-born, and the rustic husband is prevailed upon to attend, he will be extremely bashful

and awkward, blushing like a schoolgirl. If the father works on the farm, his mates will expect to be treated to a glass or two of ale, to "wet the youngster," and "drenk 'is 'ealth," and the wish is acceded to good-humouredly.

A short while ago an amusing incident happened in respect to a birth in the village. The occupants of a cottage were expecting a baby, and devoutly wished for a son; they had three daughters already, and longed for a male. After the husband left home in the morning the accouchement took place; the nurse had not yet arrived, so two women were sent for, both mothers of large families, and they pronounced the new-born to be "a bwoy this time, for certin"; the mother was rendered happy with the news. When the father came home in the evening, messengers awaited him on the road to tell the joyful tidings; everyone complimented him on the way; he was beside himself. Before he reached home, however, the nurse had arrived, and when he got there himself his countenance fell; it was a daughter after all. Everyone laughed at the joke, and at the two women especially, and called them simpletons; they couldn't understand it at all, they said.

Marriages of parties of the same village are rare. Schoolboy and girl courtships do not often continue after the tender age and develop into riper affection, though there are exceptions, of course. If the young woman has an attachment at home in the village, when she gets out in service and sees the world she generally changes her mind and bestows her affection elsewhere. Often it is a case of going farther and

faring worse; perhaps she is taken with a smart outer appearance, marries, and shortly after repents; she would have been better advised to keep to her old love at home, but it is too late now. "'Er made 'er bed, an' 'er must lay on it," the country folk say.

In the majority of cases, however, the girls of the village have formed no attachment before leaving home; these invariably find a husband, sooner or later, and settle down among strangers. When the "young man" is brought home for the first time, all eyes are upon him; he has to run the gauntlet, and be subjected to a cross-fire of criticism. "What zart ov a fella is a?" "Is a any good?" "Smartish swell, yen a?" "Dwun like the looks o' ee!" "What do a do?" "Wha's is name when a's at whum?" "A puts I in mind of a Londoner." The wedding is certain to take place in the village, at which all the feminine population usually attend; after that the entertainment is kept up at the bride's home till early next morning; in a day or so they leave for their new abode—in the Midlands, or the Metropolis, or elsewhere. "Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife?" the parson asked recently in the village over the fields. "Yes, if er's a mine to't," was the brisk reply. Then, as they left the altar, the bridegroom blurted out: "Aa, tha bist married now mun, owld wench!" He was evidently bent upon getting the upper hand in the new condition of things. One poor fellow, a farm-labourer, on a broiling hot day in summer, came to church without the necessary document; he had walked five miles off the hills, and had to walk back again after it in sultry weather. Though

pressed for time, however, he just managed the journey, and luckily, too, for all concerned; a child was born early the next morning.

When a death occurs the bell is tolled from the tower, the little one for an infant, the heavy one for one of riper years; all the cottage blinds in the vicinity are drawn; there are many sympathizers. A number go to view the corpse; that is a custom rigidly observed by rustic people. "Lar, a's very natteral, poor dear an in. Feel 'is poor 'ands!" It is the rule to feel the corpse; then the villagers say you will not dream of the dead, which you will otherwise do. At the funeral the bearers are chosen from the dead person's near acquaintances, his workmates if possible; Jemmy Boulton and old Daniel Lewis both named men to be their bearers before they died. Half-a-crown each is the fee for the bearers, and an invitation to tea beside, or otherwise bread and cheese, and several mugs of beer; the funeral always terminates in a feast. The same thing happened in Homer's time. After the burning of Hector's body on the pyre, we read that "when they had raised the mound above the ashes they went into the palace of Priam, and partook of a splendid feast"; so the custom has not materially changed for nearly 3,000 years.

Formerly, when a farmer died, his body was brought for burial in a waggon, and the bearers, men of his own farm, wore white smocks; but that custom is rare now, in these parts at least, though old Farmer Westell, of Friar's Mill, was conveyed to Sennington Churchyard in a manure-cart. The villagers are calm and philosophic, though very

reverent, in the presence of death. They console themselves with various reflections and sentiments, usually adding, "Us didn't all come together, an' us shan't all go together. The Almighty knows wha's best for us. Chent no use to murmur. Lar! it might be my time next, or else thine; us never knows a minute." That is the stoicism of the country-side.

CHAPTER XIII

"Monotony"—Caring for the cattle—Calves and lambs—The sheep-dog—Wood-cutting—Trees and plants—Harvesting and gleaning—Threshing—The hand-threshers—Gipsies—Pets—Local flowers.

HAS it never occurred to you, when someone or other has remarked on the "monotony" of village life, and the toil of the fields, how positively false and truthless that assertion is? Why, the life of the farm is the very opposite of monotony, it is nothing but change and variety, day after day, week in and week out, all the year together; there is no sameness at all about it. Perhaps farm life may be a little dull in the very dead of winter, in the short dark days, when the sun does not rise till past eight, and rolls lazily along the tops of the hills, and dips again before four in the afternoon; or when the sky is dark with cloud and mist, or thick fog fills the whole valley, or the rain pelts down for hours and hours, perhaps for several days at a stretch, keeping the teams from the field, the kine in the shed, and the children from school; flooding the roads, and lanes, and meadows, so that the course of the Cole is visible for miles; when you may stand on far-off Liddington Hill, or Charlbury the day after and see the sun glistening on the water-meadows, as it were on a large inland lake;

then possibly you may speak of dulness, but only in a comparative sense, never absolutely. And if village life is dull then, what of town life, and town labour, in the store, in the warehouse, in the street, the railway-yard, the workshop, and factory? Do you not think that is dull and monotonous too? I should say that it is, and I have experienced it long enough. It is the dullest of dulness, and twenty times monotony. Do you know what the town folk say of dull, wet weather in the winter? They say it is "rotten." Work is "rotten"; everything is "rotten"; it makes you feel "rotten," they say. I do not know if any of you have ever seen "rotten" weather or no; for my part, I have not, and let me tell you this, you never hear a countryman say the weather is "rotten." If it is wet he says it is a "damp mornin'," if heavy it is "terr'ble dull," or it may even be "main uncid," but never "rotten"; it is not so monotonous to him. But the urban condition is chiefly monotonous. Take the shop-walker behind his counter, or the clerk on his stool, or the tramcar driver, or the schoolmaster even, with his daily lessons and routine, the policeman on his beat, the signalman in his cabin, and, ah! just step into the workshop, here, if you please; come into the shadows, critic, and see monotony here, if you will. See that smith and his mate, bare and sweating there, hammering for dear life on that forging? For weeks and weeks they are at the same hard laborious task, morning till night, day after day the same; perhaps that is not monotony? Now look yonder at that stamper, with his steam-hammer and oil forge,

dragging wearily and painfully backwards and forwards with his hot heavy bars of metal, hands and legs and everything employed at once, sore-handed and sore-footed—sore-hearted, too, depend upon it—but forced to do it all the same, occupied every minute—yes, every minute—sick and weary, hopeless and aimless, as much a machine as the hammer itself, or the shafting over his head. There is no change of sky for him; sunshine or shadow without, it is all the same, though he often prays for dulness, hoping to be a little cooler thereby. There! is not that monotony? Or the boilerman putting in endless rivets, or the driller drilling endless holes, or the carpenter shaving endless planks, or the coalie wheeling endless barrows of mineral—is not this the same? Hark at those boilers roaring off their surplus energy there, with a din that shatters you to the very soul; take heed to that steam-saw screeching its way through the half-cold rail; hear those belts flapping up and down; look at those wheels whirling round like lightning over your head; see the crowd of workmen, first filing in and afterwards filing out again, for ever, as it seems. Why, it is all monotony; the monotony from which there is no escape; the monotony that drives you mad, that disheartens you, unnerves you, unmans you. There is nothing in the village like that. If it is cloudy one day, it is bright the next; the face of Nature is always changing; work is enlightened by surroundings. The rustic's task is seldom the same; he has fresh duties—spring, summer, autumn, and winter—almost every day varying and different. The country is never irksome

and tedious; unless the blue heavens with the dream-like clouds are monotonous, or the trees budding from rich brown to brilliant green, or the emerald and gold of the meadows, or the myriads of wild flowers all around, or the hedgerows teeming with busy life, or the skylark or thrush, blackbird or gold-finch singing, or the beautiful panorama of the hills, or the ever-changing hues of the corn-field. Even the cattle, and sheep, and horses change. Some kine drop out of the herd as "barreners," and fresh ones come in with young calves; the ewes present the shepherd with a multitude of lambs, and the mares have foals. Who shall say that the village life and work are monotonous now? It is not so, and never will be. But I have said enough on the matter.

The amount of work to be performed on the farm in the winter months varies considerably, according to the nature of the land, whether pasture or arable is predominant. If the land is chiefly arable, such as it is along the downs to the south of you there, and the winter is very wet, there will not be very much doing, for the teams will not be able to get on with their ploughing and cleaning; though if the weather be chiefly open and dry there will be plenty of work done then; while if the farm is mostly pasture, and milking cows are kept, the winter will prove a very busy season indeed; all the cattle will be lying in, and that entails considerable labour, weekdays and Sundays too. The cowman super-intends everything relating to this branch of farm-life; he knows just when to call the herd home from

the fields in autumn, to arrange for their comfort during the winter months, and when to turn them out again in the spring. He must, furthermore, be acquainted with the complaints and diseases of cattle, able to cure coughs and colds, which soon develop into pneumonia if not attended to; to drench them for disorders, and see to the safe delivery of the calves; he is very often about all night in the wet and cold attending to this, and does not expect to receive any additional emolument, for that is understood in his agreement.

Almost all cattle-pens are built fronting the south, south-west, or west. This is to protect the kine from the bitter cold of the north and east in winter. Very often the long stalls are divided into pens to contain one beast each, or they may be chained side by side. without a partition, or allowed to walk about the yard, and driven in the shelter to be milked. The yard is generally surrounded with a high wall, or otherwise with flakes, stuffed with long bushes; and if the animals are chained up in the pens or stall, a great part of the open side may be filled with bushes too, to keep them warm, for you cannot expect to derive a good supply of rich milk from a cow that is half-frozen in the shed.

If the kine are fairly well conditioned, they will be very happy and contented in their winter-quarters. They understand the time of day very well, and recognize their keepers; when they see their accustomed attendant coming with the familiar bundle of sweet-scented hay, they greet him with a good-natured and good-tempered "M—m—m," and look

at him with most expressive eyes. After biting a few mouthfuls of the aromatic stuff—how skilfully they lick it up from the crib !—they generally manage to gather some up on their horns, and go on eating with it there, hanging over their eyes, as if they liked to feel it and play with it. Young heifers and yearlings will often gather up half an armful on their heads, and race all about the yard with it for very ridiculousness ; they can no more be prevented from sport and mischief than young children.

How very proud the young heifer is of her first-born ! She will scarce leave it a moment. She licks it over a hundred times and more. If you touch the youngster, she immediately comes up to you to be sure that you do not intend it any harm. If it lies down in the meadows, she grazes close around it ; and if it runs puffing and snorting all about the field, with tail straight up, she will run after it too, greatly surprised and alarmed at the strange capers it is cutting ; and when it is taken from her she is unconsolable for two or three days ; after that the babe is forgotten.

The little calves are pretty creatures and very amusing. They are fond of fun and sport, and generally anxious to play with you. When you enter the yard, or close, they race round and come up to you, head down, and very often bunt you severely, though it is all done with the very best of intentions ; they are simply telling you, in their way, how very glad they are to see you, and what a great joy it is to be alive. To wean calves the cowman obtains warm milk with linseed in a pail, and places

his fingers in the little one's mouth. The calf sucks these with all its might, then the milk is applied; it soon learns to drink by this method.

Cows and cattle, though not ranking high in intelligence, perhaps, are great Nature-lovers, and derive intense pleasure from life in the fields; you have but to observe them a little to be well assured of this. How perfectly the colour of a herd fits in and harmonises with rural landscape, the sky, trees, and field! It is altogether a part of it, and identical with it. What could be more exquisite to the touch than the dewlap of a sleek, healthy beast! It is unspeakably rich and sensuous. Milking machines are creeping into favour at some farms. Milking by this means is done with a vacuum arrangement. The cows like it very well, I am told. A few days ago I watched two heifers having a friendly trial of strength and skill in the field. They were very careful not to hurt each other, and continued some time at it. It was merely the tame exercise of an almost entirely forgotten faculty, but it recalled the times when their ancestors ran wild about the plains, and fought each other in deadly earnestness.

The little lambs are born in February. This is a period of great labour and anxiety to the shepherd; there is so much to be done, especially where the flock is extensive. He has been getting the fold ready for a long time; the more ewes there are, the more work there is to be performed. The fold is like a little city within. The pens are constructed in lines like streets; some this way and some that, at right angles, a row each side. These are about

five feet high, warmly thatched, protected well at the sides, and the whole fold without the same. Perhaps there are a hundred and fifty pens. These contain one ewe each. The shepherd can see which will bring forth first; these are brought into the pens. After the lambs are born, they stay in several days, then go out in the fold, and other ewes come in as before. At lambing-time the shepherd lives in his little cot, or hut, on wheels, and seldom goes home; he must be at hand to care for his ewes and family of little ones, though he has several assistants to help with the feeding of the flock. How important the shepherd is, and yet his wages are nothing much! A town mechanic, with no knowledge of life at all, concerned with dull, senseless blocks of iron and steel, receives double and treble for his work, yet is quite unworthy to be ranked with the kindly and experienced old shepherd.

As the shepherd is, so is his dog—wise, careful, and intelligent, and often little thought of. He knows the sheep well, and understands his master perfectly; whatever the order is, it is carried out faithfully and with little ostentation. The shepherd seldom humours the animal, but speaks to it bluntly, often gruffly, and orders it here and there very unceremoniously; yet how friendly the twain are! and how trustful of each other! The shepherd would not part with it for the world almost, unless compelled to.

I once went to see a very remarkable dog at a penny show in the town. It was a very ordinary-looking animal, a Yorkshire terrier, but it was pos-

sessed of uncommon intelligence. Its owner was a poor, ignorant fellow, not half as clever as his brute. The dog walked round a ring in which were cards containing figures up to twenty, and the words "yes" and "no" on others. You might ask the dog any question in arithmetic, and he answered it by taking up the cards with his mouth. It told me the dates of all the coins I had without removing them from my pockets, and my factory check-number as well; and not only so, but this latter had been altered a short while before, and it told me the number on that, too. It told the actual time indicated by your watch, whether that was correct or not, your age also, and the total of any addition sum you cared to write. I personally wrote many lists of figures, removing from the sight of the animal, and its answers in each case were absolutely correct. What is more, no one came between yourself and the dog; you asked all the questions yourself. I am not skilled in metaphysical science, and do not pretend to know anything about higher intelligences, and cannot explain the matter, but what I have said is an incontrovertible fact. After all, it may be simple enough to some people, though I was always puzzled how to account for it.

If the weather has been very wet before Christmas, and retarded the ploughing, that will nevertheless proceed apace as soon as the days brighten in the New Year; every advantage must then be taken of dry weather to get ahead with preparatory work, scarifier, harrow, and so on, cleaning the land ready for spring drill. The winter wheat, oats, and beans

will have been up a long time; the rigours of winter will not have hurt them. That which damages young wheat is a sudden change from mild rainy weather to sharp frost, while the corn is green and tender; but if there has been a fine day or two, or a little drying wind, such as whitens the tips of the young blades, and hardens them off, then any amount of frost will not harm it after that. As for the beans, they will grow steadily all the winter through, and will be in blossom soon after Easter. The earliest field of beans I have seen in bloom was in North Wales, close to the sea, which struck me as singular, since it is very cold there; yet frost is not as prevalent as it is farther south.

Wood-cutting is in full swing during January and February, and March as well, hedge-cutting and laying too. There is great skill required in the successful cutting and laying of a mound; an inexperienced workman would soon play havoc with it, spoiling the layers, and causing great gaps to appear afterwards, and leaving it unsightly into the bargain. There is not only a knowledge of detail required, but of perspective too; the cutter must understand design and proportion; he must be, in fact, in great part an artist; there is far more real skill required in it than in building a wall or constructing a fence of posts and rails. The ash wood in the copse there has taken thirty years to attain to that height; it is being cut for poles now, for fencing and other purposes. These are worth about three shillings a dozen.

How rich the elm-trees look, covered with bloom

in March! In the mass they appear almost a crimson. By-and-by this will disappear; a strong wind or two will soon scatter it from the branches. The sallow, in blossom now, is very beautiful, the pure silver of the one, the green or rich gold of the other, and it is delightfully fragrant. If you enter the little copse, where the sallows grow, on a warm sunny day, the hum of the bees will soon acquaint you of their whereabouts. The country children call these pussy cats.

The buds of the poplar and birch are very large and of a rich brown all the winter, faintly odorous too. The poplar leaves are always rustling, in the slightest breeze. The long slender stems are the cause of this; they are so delicately suspensive. The poet of the *Odyssey*, who seems to have had an eye for everything, employs the poplar in a striking similitude. He says the women in the palace of Alcinous were "like poplar leaves at their work." Is not this a wonderful figure? How closely the elder-buds nestle round the twig in early February, when the tiny leaves first begin to expand, and how purple they are, as if they were livid with the cold! The ash-buds are quite black. The leaves of the ash are among the last to arrive and the first to depart; the first frost in October will bring them all down to the ground.

The beech-buds are wonderful all the winter through. I have sat in the boughs of the tree on Callis Hill, and watched their development with delightful interest. Before the old leaves fall they are there, a quarter of an inch long; by the winter

they have doubled this almost. Even then, if you take one to pieces, removing fold after fold of the sheath, you will find the silver velvety leaf-bunch within, like a tiny miracle. The points of the buds are very hard and sharp; you might easily pierce your flesh with them. Beside the lambs' tails on the hazel, there is the blossom too. This is a tiny tuft, of a rich crimson lake colour, on the tip of each bud. If you gather the twigs, however, you will be disappointed; the little blossom soon withers.

The henbit is in bloom all the winter long, chickweed and groundsel the same. The earliest celandines grow at the foot of the railway embankment by the side of the ditch there; you may gather them in mid-February. Buxbaum's speedwell blooms all the winter also. I saw a fine speedwell in the gardens of Stanton House, a year ago, which I could not classify; it was as handsome in foliage as a geranium, with large flowers. There are a few bushes of barberry in Poorfield hedge. The young leaves of this taste exactly like the sorrel, juicy, and sweetish. The villagers have great faith in barberry as a medicine; they say it is the only thing that will cure the jaundice. Hogweed stems are not unlike celery in taste. The spindle-tree is rare here, but it grows in Ashdown Wood. The hawthorn hedges are red with berries now, though it is March; the birds have not wanted for food. A sparrow's nest was found with eggs in January; a very little climatic aberration is enough to set aside the accumulated hereditary quality. Which had we

first, the bird or the egg? Another thing asked is, whether the hammer was made first, or the tongs. But these are old questions.

In March and April all the meadows are bushed over and afterwards rolled. The first operation breaks the clots of manure into fine pieces, the latter compresses the roots of the grass, and gives it bottom vigour. In rolling the fields all the daisies and celandines are mercilessly treated, but they soon stand up again more proudly than ever. Very often a large log of wood is bound on the roller to make it heavier. In May the cows are turned out in the fields, to rejuvenate among the fresh young grass. For the first day or two they are beside themselves, and indulge in the wildest of sports and capers, but soon get accustomed to the change. Immediately the milk improves; the butter, if pure, will become a rich golden yellow, but there is shameful adulteration practised in the making-up of it, even at some of the farm-houses. A great many purchase salt butter at a cheap rate, and after washing it well, mix it with the new. If you see white streaks in the fresh-cut roll or pat, you may be sure you have not the pure article. Only dishonest people do this, however; the pity is that such are not rare nowadays.

When June comes in, preparations are made for haymaking; the implements and machinery are drawn out from the sheds, and overhauled or sent to the blacksmith. The corn-crops must be attended to as well, and other things planted, such as rape, swedes, mangolds, and turnips. When the young

roots come up they must be hoed, and then cut out to a uniform distance. These want plenty of nice showers to help them along, though mangolds may do very well in a dry season. Haymaking usually lasts for a month, if the weather is normal; if it is wet, it may not be finished before September. Farmer Wheeler, of Rowborough Lane, was entirely ruined by the failure of hay-crops. His was all pasture land, and situated by the river; excessive rains came, and the floods washed the whole of it away, and left him penniless.

After haymaking comes the harvest. Now all the corn is cut by machinery. Fagging was the universal method before that, and, still earlier, reaping by hand with the sickle. Farmer Davis, of Rove's Farm, was the last in this neighbourhood to resort to machine reaping. He employed a great number of hands, men and women too, did his land well, cleaned and manured it thoroughly, reaped great crops, and was highly prosperous. I can just remember reaping with the sickle in his fields. That was in 1882. There stood the long stubble, about eighteen inches high. This was very often mowed with a scythe afterwards for litter; it made excellent manure.

Harvest-bugs are an inconvenience of the corn-field. These are exceedingly minute, red in colour. They are very partial to coltsfoot; the under parts of the leaves of this are red with them. These burrow in the flesh and set up great irritation, though the true rustic does not take much notice of them. Homer gives us a delightful picture of the reapers, from the shield of Achilles, in the *Iliad*. First of all are the

men ploughing, the interesting feature of which is that when they turn round at the headland others are waiting with the wine-jar, or bowl, and put it into the ploughman's hands for him to take a draught. That was ploughing made easy, I should think. After this is the harvest. Here is the heavy crop, and the reapers with sickles in their hands; the thick abundant sheaves are lying on the ground. There are three men binding up the sheaves. The little children are bringing the corn to them, carrying it in their arms. The "king," or otherwise the master-farmer, stood by with his staff or sceptre, "rejoicing in his heart"; and well enough he might! He must be very dull-souled who would not be happy in such conditions. According to Horace and Virgil the reapers in their time drank a decoction of thyme and garlic, which was good to quench the thirst. What that was like I do not know—strong-flavoured, no doubt, from Horace's poem to Mæcenas, in which he mentions the point. I expect Dudley Sansum and the rest would have much preferred a drink of ale out of the little wooden bottle or jar.

As soon as a piece of corn was cleared, word was sent all round the village for the gleaners to come out and gather up the remainder. In earlier times still, before my own day, the church bell was rung to signify that the corn was cleared, though all that has passed away now. At the end of wheat-harvest it was also the custom for the school-children to gather in the field and ride down to the farm on the last loads. These were pitched up on to the load with the big fork. The fork was placed under their arms,

and they held tight to it, and the loader received them safely in his hands. What joy it was to them to ride down to the farm in that manner!

The village schools were always closed for gleaning. This was the harvest holidays. Nearly all the village wives turned out, and the children went, too. We took the day's provisions in a bag, and a cup to dip the water from the little spring bubbling up under the hazels, with a clean white sheet, or counterpane, taken from the bed, for the "nitches," and small linen ear-bags to be fastened round the waist for the loose ears, broken off by the reapers, or more frequently "britted" off by the heat of the sun. There were always a few to anticipate the general hive, and have the early run of the field, though these frequently fared worst in the end. My mother and we children were usually the last to enter a field and the last to leave it. Our appearance was hailed with a good-natured cheer, and often a little humorous banter, but we always bore off the fattest bundle in the end. We used to consider our harvest a poor one if it did not total fifteen or sixteen bushels of threshed grain. Gleaning in a field that had been overrun was called "prowling."

There were eight of us altogether—my mother and six others—ranging from five to thirteen years. All the children gathered small handfuls, then brought them to her; she put them together into one, twisted a part of the straw round several times, and thrust the ends underneath the bond, then set it down in the stubble, ears up, and went on as before. In the morning we had lunch at ten, dinner at noon, with

"little dinner" again in the afternoon, about four. We went home about six or seven, telling the time by the sun. Perhaps we gathered forty large handfuls, or perhaps less, according to the quantity of ears on the ground. We always gleaned more in dull weather; then we could see the ears better. At night, after reaching home, all the ears were cut off with a sharp knife or scissors, and then stored in sacks and kept indoors. The cottage was like a little barn, upstairs and down, too; you could scarcely move for the corn.

The fields of the village presented a far different appearance then from what they do now. The majority were surrounded with hedges of hazel, sloe, and elder; we played all kinds of pranks among the boughs at dinner-time, especially if showers came on, at hide-and-seek, and nutting in the copses. Sometimes a shooting-party came by, and we ran after them to pick up the spent cartridges, or made a bridle with our garters, and rode a quiet old chestnut in a neighbouring meadow, or waded bare-footed in the shallow stream; but we were never allowed to go home before we had gleaned a stated quantity, weather permitting.

A great change has come over the country-side latterly, however. The old school of farmers is dying out, and the villagers, too. The crops are cut by machinery, and the fields raked to the last ear, and afterwards given up to sheep and swine; gleaning is often prohibited, even. Moreover, the villagers are disinclined to go gleaning; perhaps that is the chief cause of its decay. The young wife thinks there is

no need for her to glean corn in the field; everything is different. The children are kept later at school; they do not benefit by the changes. It is nearly ten years since I saw gleaners in the field; that was at Collingbourne, midway between Marlborough and Andover.

The old farmers used to give bacon to their men several times during the harvest, in portions of about seven pounds. If there were father and son, the two received twelve pounds. In addition to this they had a cooked dinner every day, of meat and vegetables, and ale in the field. At Michaelmas they received a bonus of thirty shillings or two pounds, which custom still continues here. Instead of giving the boys money, the farmer "looked round" them, to see what they were in need of, and bought them clothes, boots, or a thick warm overcoat.

Very soon after harvest threshing began. The engine and machine, covered with tarpaulins, were drawn from farm to farm by strong teams of horses, three or four on each; the troops of children, boys and girls too, followed them all up the lane, greatly excited; it was wonderful to them to see the black smoke towering out of the tall iron chimney, the piston-rod shooting silently in and out, the wheels spinning round, and the long belt communicating power to the thresher, the chaff and chaving flying, and the straw rustling down behind. The humming of the thresher has a peculiar fascination as well, especially at that time of the year; it sounds so mournful and plaintive borne to you over the field; it is like a dirge to the dying year, yet it is not a

depressing sound at all, but exactly fits in with the surroundings of the farm and country-side.

The engine was drawn in first, then the thresher. The latter is set in position near the corn rick, and the wheels secured with wedges to prevent it from shifting under the power of the belt. Then the engine is set, too, at a certain distance, and the wheels firmly wedged as well. Sometimes shallow holes are dug for the wheels to drop in, to prevent motion, for the engine oscillates considerably under the force of the steam. The farmer supplies coal for the boiler, and must also see to the water. This is contained in a large tub close to the fire-box. Two rubber tubes are inserted from the engine; the exhaust steam is ejected from one of these, the water is injected by means of the other. There are two men in charge of the tackle; one of these attends to the engine, the other feeds the thresher. Dudley Sansum and old Thomas Bowles used to do this in turns, and so equalize the labour; they were both exceedingly proud of their engine. Four sacks are suspended at the rear of the machine for catching the grain. One of these is for the most inferior, all kinds of seeds and stuff; one is for the seconds, and the other two for the firsts. This patters down from the fans within like hail-stones; it is delightful to catch it in the hand as it falls into the mouth of the sack. The Emperor Caius is said to have rolled naked in gold; I should much prefer to roll naked in wheat. At ten, or half-past, the whistle sounds, all stop for lunch; dinner at twelve, "little dinner" at four, bread, cheese, and ale, which is especially plentiful at

threshing-time, for there is much work to be done, carrying away the straw, and one thing and the other. "As hard as a day's dreshin';" you often hear the villagers say. The price for threshing, to the owners of the tackle, is about thirty shillings a day; under ordinary circumstances the day's work will amount to a hundred and twenty sacks of grain.

The price for flail-threshing, in old times, was sixpence a bushel, winnowing and all. Sometimes, though, the threshers worked at the day rate, and received nine shillings and often only eight shillings a week, and no beer into the bargain, and if they "scamped" the work, that is, did not clean the grain out, they were liable to prosecution. For instance, Dad Eldridge's father and his mate were summoned to appear before the magistrates at Faringdon, on February 5, 1834, to answer the charge of not cleaning out the barley they were engaged upon, and both went expecting to receive punishment of some kind or other. Now, they were only getting eight shillings a week, while the men in the barn next to them were receiving nine shillings, so, as soon as the case came on, the Chairman asked the rate of wages paid, and on hearing it was only eight shillings he told the farmer to "take them home and give them nine shillings too, and if they failed to clean the barley out then, to bring them back to him again."

Occasionally, hand-threshing was paid for by the quarter; the men worked on, drawing a weekly wage, and when the corn was winnowed up, if there was a balance, they received it in a lump sum. The winnowing was done separately with a hand-machine,

in another part of the barn. Beans were paid for at the rate of fourpence a bushel. Horse-threshing followed the flail method. This machine merely threshed the corn; that fell through on the ground, chaff and all, and was then passed through the winnower. Four horses operated this machine, attached to a lever outside the barn. Beer was supplied three times a day. The steam-thresher came into these parts for the first time in 1851. First of all it was a steam-engine to the old horse thresher, and the winnowing was done as before. Then the winnower was improved, first to single, and afterwards to double fan. The old horse-machine did about half of what the steam threshers do. Now, instead of portable engines, tractions do the work. This is more convenient altogether, as there is much time saved in drawing the tackle to and fro. These usually convey a chaff-cutter and elevator. If they are threshing oats, the cutter-machine receives the straw from the thresher and converts it into chaff straight away. Before the chaff-cutting machines which are operated with a wheel, the chaff used to be cut by hand, with a large knife. The hay was fixed in a box-like receptacle, and held in place by means of the foot. The operator pushed the hay along, bore a lever down with the foot, and drew the large sharp knife across. For this he was paid at the rate of twopence halfpenny per basket of four bushels.

Formerly a great many Irishmen came over the Channel every year, to haymaking and harvesting, and then returned in time to get their crops of potatoes in, in late autumn. These lived very

scantily and frugally, and were hard workers; they saved quite a little pile before going back to the "Old Country." They lived almost entirely on bread and cheese, or cold boiled bacon, and drank ale, cider, and water, not much tea. There was one came regularly to the farm, old Jemmy; he used to make a good meal off bread and young onions. He was very wise and careful, and of sterling principle. The migration of labourers in husbandry was common in Italy in ancient times, and is still continued there to-day. Every year several thousands of industrious labourers cross over from the Duchies of Parma and Modena to the island of Corsica, returning to the Continent when the harvest is got in.

Gipsies visited the village when I was a boy, and pitched their camps annually in the Green Lane. These were very peaceable and friendly, for the most part; the village children used to mix with them, and be very often invited to tea or supper. They are very hardy and long-lived; "Mother" Salty, a well-known local gipsy woman, lived to be a hundred. In the winter the men used to go "hedgehog hunting," and indulge in a tasty meal. These little animals make a warm nest in a "stowl," and sleep all the winter; it is then they are best for food. The flesh of the hedgehog is savoury and palatable, something like poultry. They are very clean, and well-known as an article of food.

The gipsy children wear no hats, and very often no boots, and seldom take cold. After all, these live as near to Nature as any, though they shun the

bath, but a great many people attain old age without that. Cæsar Augustus avoided frequent use of the bath, as detrimental to health. His uncle Julius always marched bare-headed with his troops to battle, rain or shine. Masinissa, the King of ancient Numidia, did the same at the age of ninety. Vespasian believed in much massage, especially of the neck, and always fasted one day every month. When he was near to death, he required to be lifted upon his feet; he said an Emperor ought to die standing up, and so he did. The children in the Alps even walk in the snow with naked feet, and suffer no inconvenience.

Not very many of the villagers keep pets, beside the ordinary domestic animals, though here and there you meet with a skylark, a blackbird, thrush, goldfinch, magpie, or jackdaw, in captivity. The other day I went to see a most interesting pet. This was a wild rabbit in a cage. It was picked up on the roadside when very tiny, and given to an innkeeper. He put it in a large cage and kept it; it is four years old now. It is very small—a female—and the tamest of all creatures; do what you will, you cannot frighten it. At its master's bidding it mounts the perch, and feigns sleep most prettily; it is full of fun and play, and its coat is as sleek and soft as silk—a delightful little creature.

Tortoises are the latest introduction as pets to the village. Dealers bring these round in baskets, going from door to door. Little Toby gave great amusement all the summer and autumn with his primitiveness and simplicity, but showed signs of great

intelligence, and was not at all a dull and stupid creature, as many suppose tortoises to be. It did not eat any food till July, then it became unusually active and ravenous, and devoured large quantities of lettuce and dandelion flowers. It would not touch milk, but drank water occasionally. It liked to be fed from the hand best, and would follow you all up the garden path for food in bright weather. If the weather was dull, it was dull, too, and did not move far from its house; then it usually came to the door and laid its head out like a dog, and went to sleep for several hours. It was very fond of rose-petals, slightly withered—white preferred. It would also eat groundsel flowers and sow-thistle bloom. But it liked autumnal hawkbit best of all; this was its daily food for two months. These little blooms were just suited for it; one head made exactly a mouthful. As soon as you held them out at some distance it came to eat them. It must have had a sense of the yellow colour, for if you showed it a marigold bloom, it would come to that too, but would not touch it. It was very active all the winter, and roamed all over the garden during Christmas week, for the weather was mild, and it was almost buried in a snowstorm once, but an unusually severe snap of frost suddenly occurred, and the tiny creature was frozen to death in its house.

The village abounds with small birds of various kinds—nightingales, thrushes, fieldfares, goldfinches, blackcaps, and others. I have already mentioned the waterfowl. Pheasants are rarer, though more numerous than they used to be. While sitting in

my garden a year ago, a little wren came and perched on my head, not accidentally, but deliberately. Several weeks ago a nightingale sat in an oak-tree by the roadside, singing lustily at midday in bright weather. At a place not far from here a blackbird builds in a house, on the mantelpiece, behind the clock, annually, and takes no notice of anyone. The day before the Coronation of King George V. a man shot a large bird here which proved to be the Egyptian ibis. This had probably escaped from an aviary somewhere or other. If a bird flying above should dirt upon you, that is considered a certain sign of good luck by the villagers. Rooks frequently indulge in a bath in the meadows. They perform their toilet with much grotesque ceremony; it is amusing to watch them spluttering about in the water. Rooks hide potatoes, and store them up for the winter, and walnuts, too, occasionally. Whole quantities of these are found in the ploughed fields sometimes. Otters are rare about the brooks, and badgers, too. I do not remember one of these latter having been seen in the village this twenty years, though they are commoner along the hillside. The keeper at Compton Beauchamp tells me he has shot several lately.

Certain wild flowers are scanty and few in the actual village; to find these it will be necessary to mount the downs, and search the woods along the border of the hills, Hodson, Ashdown, and Uffington, though even here in the valley we are by no means destitute of choice floral wealth and beauty. How many of you have gathered the sweet everlasting

wild-pea, or the wonderful little lilac ivy-leaved toad-flax? The former of these grows on the railway-bank; the other thrives and blooms on a stone wall. This is said never to grow far from water, and there is a brook not many yards distant. The other day I found this in a wall at Wanborough, close to the hill, but, looking down, I saw there was a tiny spring near at hand. The little rue-leaved saxifrage is another wall-plant, exceedingly diminutive; this I discovered on an old wall near Sevenhampton. Meadow saxifrage is abundant along the downs, but does not grow here. The spotted orchis is found in Poorfield Copse. Dropwort is an elegant plant of the meadow-sweet family, though a little larger in the bud, and not so tall. The plant I have I imported from Bury Hill, near Andover. This has no connection with water-dropwort, common in the pools here, and deadly poisonous. The latter is like the fool's parsley of the garden, another poisonous plant.

Theocritus, in the thirteenth Idyll, speaks of the dark-blue celandine, *Chelidonium cyaneon*, which grew near the fountain where little Hylas went to fetch water, and where he was drawn in by the nymphs and drowned. How I should love to gather it! The blue hyacinth is found in Stanton Woods. The clary, another pure blue, rare and exquisite, is not found here in the valley, but when I was visiting Stonehenge I happened on a plant in bloom at Amesbury. With all due respect to the ancient Britons, and their Druidical wonders, I think I experienced more true pleasure at discovering the

clary than at viewing the stones, though perhaps I am childish in my predilections. Then there is still another purplish blue, the viper's bugloss, most pretty and quaint, stiff and prickly as a thistle almost, and very uncommon. I have only seen this once, that was on the roadside, a few miles from Faringdon. That day was a memorable one for me; for in it I wrote a poem on the smith, discovered the bugloss, and was savagely bitten by a dog. That was in July, 1910.

The bell-flowers are abundant on the downs. These are blue also. The clustered bell-flower is dwarf, about six inches high, and grows on the turf; the nettle-leaved variety stands four feet, and inhabits the woods. There also you may find the centaury, and the betony, both largely used for medicinal tea in the locality; and the blue and pink milkwort as well, with the beautiful golden rock-rose, pretty little tormentil, heather or ling, and exquisite harebell, the true "bluebell of Scotland." The cornflower is common, but that does not detract from its charms and beauty. This is the *bluet* of the French. Poor unhappy Moreau wrote of it most feelingly in the elegy to his little river, La Voulzie:

"Bluet éclos parmi les roses de Provins."

That poem of his, "Un souvenir à l'hôpital," in which he looks back upon his early years spent among the flowers, touches you to the very soul. "O que la vie est douce!" he exclaims, dying unloved and friendless in Paris at an early age. Love of flowers and Nature among the Latins seems rather to

have been subjective and artificial; it is seldom as spontaneous as that of the early Greeks and moderns. Our English Chaucer taught us to love beauty for beauty's sake.

The little yellow dead-nettle is sweetly pretty. I have gathered this in Ashdown Wood. The plant in my garden, transported thence, has made over twenty feet of runners this season. The bee orchis is found on the downs at Bishopstone, and the butterfly orchis at Burderop. Mountain crane's-bill grows on the road-side at Wroughton, and the small-flowered crane's-bill at St. Margaret. The orpine, which is to be found in nearly every cottage garden, grows plentifully at Portland among the rocks and stones, and is brilliant in effect. I gathered some valerian at Woolstone last year. There are several plants of this at the back of Liddington Hill, too. Daffodils and lily of the valley are abundant in the woods near Marlborough. Other flowers of the locality are alkanet, woodruff, moschatel, wood-sanicle, hound's tongue, soap-wort, tooth-wort, henbane, and birds'-nest orchis.

But what are the villagers doing? Let us relinquish Nature a moment, and finish our study of them, then to the woods and fields again, with a clear conscience. In all things duty before pleasure; work first and play after; that intensifies the relish a hundredfold. "Labor ipse voluptas" (Labour itself is a pleasure), saith the sage.

CHAPTER XIV

Conventionalism—Villagers' relations—The old postman—Oaks and acorns—Food of the villagers—Surnames—Proverbs and sayings—Farm fires—The old agricultural riots—The future outlook—Depopulation—Education—Wages of farm-labourers—A plea for the rustic.

FIRST of all—it is very nearly last of all—a word or two as to people's opinion touching ourselves; I mean those of us who dwell in villages, either in this, or some other. There is a great deal said concerning the ignorance and stupidity of rustic people, their slavishness, and clownishness, and the rest of it. I have even heard that we lead an "animal kind of existence." As to that, I will leave everyone to judge for himself, but I think otherwise. The fact of a man's being deeply attached to the soil, and careless of the world's strife and tumult, does not make him an animal. Even if he cannot read nor write, he is not an animal then, unless you would prefer to call Jemmy Boulton and Dudley Sansum animals, which I, at any rate, should never subscribe to. Then there is the question of slavishness, and clownishness, and churlishness, but these are mistaken qualities, too, or grossly misapplied, or I have strangely misread the indications and evidence of country human nature.

As to the former of these, I have already dealt with it, sufficiently I hope. All I can say about that matter now is that if rustic people are slaves they are not the only ones. There is ten times greater slavery and bondage in towns and cities and manufactories than among the fields and hedgerows. That is where they cringe and fawn and grovel in servitude, and sigh and groan, shedding tears, and worshipping idols. Are the villagers really churlish and unsympathetic? Why, everyone speaks to everyone in country places, each to all, and all to each, strangers as well. That may be simplicity. I have heard it called extremely inconvenient, and a nuisance, which may be so, but it is the reverse of churlishness. No one speaks to you in the towns, on the other hand. There you may wander for hours, up and down, pushing and shoving with the crowd, or meeting with a sea of faces, but there is no greeting, no recognition, no smile of welcome; simply the cold stare, the vacant regard, the inquisitorial glance, or downright indifference.

I have often thought of the conventionalism of people, and the great gulfs we set between ourselves, all ranks and conditions alike. You must never address a stranger familiarly; if you should do so you would assuredly be counted "not quite the thing." Socrates used to say that if he should point with his index-finger, that would be well enough; but if he should use the next one to it, he would be considered mad. It is just the same in our own day. I have often met with those who were sick, or looking ill, crippled, lacking a limb, the victim of some

accident or other, and desired to speak with them, but have been deterred for no other reason than because I was a total stranger. Etiquette prevents it, forbids it. Sometimes I should like to address a word of compliment or admiration, but that would be far worse; and if you should express it with the eye, even that is considered impudent and insulting. So you are debarred in each case, both from expressing sympathy, encouragement, or compliment. There is another thing I have frequently noticed, and perhaps you have as well, that is, the difference most people make between receiving a visitor and the sending off of the same. The former is almost always of the most half-hearted nature, very often cold and formal; the other is attended with most warm embraces, hand-shakings, and oft-repeated felicitations, a veritable enthusiasm. What hypocritical stuff we mortals are made of! If you're smart, you're stuck up; if you're careless and indifferent, you're dirty and untidy; if you spend, you're a rake; if you save, you're a miser; if you're quiet, you're proud; if affable, you're forward and impudent; if conservative, you're an ass and a blockhead; and if original, you're downright insolent and intolerable. What is one to do, finally? All this arises from custom and convention, from our manner of looking at things; but it is not true, or natural, or reasonable even, but sloppy and artificial, positive falsehood. The old hero Achilles "hated him like the gates of hell, that said one thing and concealed another in his heart." Let us, at any rate, try to be straight and plain, simple and ingenuous. This con-

ventionalism is a sham and a mockery. Bluntness is a rare virtue in comparison with it.

The villagers' relations one with another are of a most simple nature. They live, for the most part, in perfect agreement with each other, friendly, and well-disposed, seldom exhibiting jealousy or rancour. Now and then there may be a slight disagreement among the youths, where several are engaged together, but that is natural; a very little will kindle them to white heat. Thus, Scamp and Smithy sometimes fought, or scratched each other—on the rick, or the load in the field, or anywhere else where they happened to differ—but no one ever took serious notice of the matter. Those engaged on separate farms do not see each other very much, except in the evening and at week-ends; then they smoke the pipe of peace, leaning over the gate, or with their backs to the wall, or visit one another's gardens or allotments, or discuss village affairs and gossip, the promise of crops, and other simple matters.

The wives' relations with one another have undergone a distinct change in late years, which is easily accounted for. Formerly the greater part of them went to work in the fields, or even where they did not do this regularly, they always helped with the hay or corn harvest, and afterwards went gleaning, and so had much in common to think and talk about. Moreover, they were thrown in healthier contact with each other. The fact of their working at the same task, very often for the same farmer, or gleaning together side by side, children and all, induced kindly

and sympathetic feeling; they entered into each other's lives and occupations more, and understood one another better. They were for ever discussing the last year's harvest or gleaning, how much leased corn they had when it was threshed, the quantity of flour returned from West Mill, and the date of the first pudding made from it. Now scarcely any of the women go out to work, or gleaning either, but stay within doors week in and week out, almost like the town people, and have little means for mixing and associating with each other. All this tends to make them exclusive, and "stand-offish"; as a matter of fact, a great many of them are almost like strangers, which would have been impossible in the old conditions. As to female labour on the land, opinion would differ, no doubt. There is labour and labour, but for my part I think it a pity the custom has diminished so much—that is, where the toil was not drudgery, and done of absolute necessity. It enabled the wife and mother to get outside her domestic cares; it cheered her mind, invigorated her body, and gave tone to her character. A little time spent in the open fields is a marvellous tonic for the system; it will quickly cure habits of melancholy and nerves. Beside this, thought itself is fresher and sweeter, more pure, and untainted in the open air.

How beautiful it is to enter the perfectly happy home, to see the old rustic and his wife living together fondly after many long years, and their grown-up sons and daughters the same! It is like a draught of heavenly pleasure, and compensates you

for much of the unkindness and disagreeableness you meet with elsewhere. Here the brothers and sisters are like sweethearts and lovers; in their letters they address each other as "darling," and when they meet, after a separation, they rush into each other's arms in an ecstasy of joy.

The village people retire early, and the farmers before the work-folk, as a rule. A great many of the farmers retire at eight, and even by seven, in the winter, after partaking of a good supper of bread and cheese, and hotted beer, or cider—wives, daughters and all. Before retiring the farmer usually takes a lantern and walks round the cattle-yard and stables, to see that everything is safe and well. Very often the farm-labourers are much later in going to bed, burning the oil till eleven and after; but this is a bad sign. In the villages farther from the town they retire much earlier.

If a fox happens to visit the pen it will always carry off the choicest poultry. A few nights ago one broke in, and out of fifty head only touched one, that was a very choice and valuable young gamecock. Baby foxes are very pretty creatures, and as playful as puppies; you may often see them in the field near the copse on summer evenings, running round and round after their tails.

Letters are delivered in the village twice daily, except Sundays, all the year round. The postman's lot is not a particularly fortunate one; he has to traverse many miles by road and field in all kinds of weather, and the remuneration is small in most cases. The other day, while sitting on the bank by

the roadside on the downs there, I gleaned some interesting information from the old letter-carrier concerning postal work and method. He thought—simple-like—from often seeing me that way, that I must have a sweetheart thereabout. As a matter of fact, I was come for quite another purpose; I was trying to discover myself. In the course of our conversation I gathered from him that he walked eighteen miles a day, and half that distance Sundays, for which he received the astounding sum of nine shillings and sixpence per week. This left him free for three hours a day, nine till twelve, in which he must have his breakfast and change his uniform previous to doing anything else. To make the best of it, the local postmaster had just sent him a notice requiring to know his earnings *in spare time!* they had just deducted eighteenpence a week from his wages for uniform.

Acorns, though an especially valuable food for swine, prove fatal to other cattle if eaten in large quantities. Cows and heifers are very fond of these; therefore, when the fruit of the oak falls in autumn, the provident farmer shuts his herds out from those fields containing the trees. Last year acorns were very numerous, and many cattle were afflicted through eating them. One farmer had no less than seventy-eight beasts die from it. Village people keep a few acorns in the house as a remedy for diarrhœa. These they dry and then grate, taking the powder. Sloe-wine is another astringent in favour with rustic people. Last year I gathered three-quarters of a peck of fine large sloes on a set of bushes four yards

in length, hanging over the stream. These made two gallons of delicious red wine.

The foliage of the oak endures heat much worse than elm, ash, beech, or poplar. Last year, which was the driest and hottest season for a century, the leaves on every oak in this district were quite parched and brown by July.

It is said that the ancient peoples worshipped the sun; and that is probable, for all animals, and vegetables, too, do the same. Do you not see how all trees lift their arms high towards him, to feel his kindly beams and receive his blessing? All the large branches are usually extended towards the south. Elm-trees are very brittle at the base. Last summer one fell down without the slightest warning, in a breathless atmosphere, and killed a man. Lightning at close quarters makes a roaring sound, and is like flame to the nostrils; it is not a pleasant experience. A local farmer had eight cows killed with it at one stroke in a field near the railway about a year ago.

When the ancient Troglodytes became so old that they could no longer follow their herds, they tied themselves by their necks to an ox's tail, and so put an end to their days, and if any deferred his death, a younger one might strangle him. This, I suppose, was the primitive form of suicide. "All the Troglodytes," we read, "are of sound bodies, and of a strong and healthful age, none exceeding threescore!"

The villagers' food, especially that of the labouring class, is plain and simple in kind, but plentiful enough. The chief article consumed is bread, and abundant

potatoes; where there is a large family of six or eight, the household requires eight or nine gallons of bread a week, or more, and then the wife and mother cooks potatoes for dinner and tea as well. The chief trimmings are Canadian bacon and cheese, butter or margarine, lard or dripping. The children eat bread and lard, with pepper upon it. When I was a child, my mother used to buy dripping of an extra special quality, which the dealer pompously informed her came from Marlborough College. This we ate with solemn reverence and an awe amounting almost to superstition, though the aristocratic stuff was no better than any other.

Bacon-pudding is a tasty meal, though waning in favour. The old carter may have a fried rasher—without the egg—for breakfast, or fried vegetables, or toasted cheese. Fresh meat is only indulged in once a week, Sundays. That is generally purchased from the van which comes round every Saturday—breast or loin of mutton, or brisket of beef—and is mostly foreign, though some country labourers will not touch the "furren tackle," and abhor all tinned goods. A short while ago a dealer was selling sausages in the village at threepence a pound, best fourpence. The carter's wife did not like the former kind: "they burned their mouths so, and made the children cry awful." At Christmas all the labourers receive a large piece of prime beef, from eight to twelve pounds, and very many a ton of coal at Michaelmas, besides a sum of money. Their drink consists chiefly of tea, very weak—this they have three and very often four times a day—and many

keep a small barrel of ale in the house, too, or else fetch it from the inn.

As to the farmers themselves, they live much better, and have the best of everything—beef, mutton, pork, lamb and veal, game and fish, whatever is in season, though here and there you find one that is "skinny" and "near," intent on making a pile at the expense of his stomach and appetite. Farmer B——'s choice came out at a gathering over which the vicar presided. Happening to discuss the price of foodstuffs, and of bacon in particular, he amused everyone by declaring his preference for "that long, thin, strakèd stuff—well, you knows, sir, the be-elly piece!" It is a point to be noticed that those farmers who are strong and hearty in health, fond of a bite and a sup, and whose cellars are well stocked with cider and ale, are always the best natured. Teetotal farmers are usually parsimonious and near, ready to extract the last ounce of labour from the individual; anyone will tell you that in the villages. "They teetotal vawk bent no good to nobody," they say. Horace says, "All hardships are laid upon teetotallers." A few farmers still bake their own bread and brew their own beer, but not many.

The village parson usually comes in for a great amount of criticism, though chiefly from outsiders; the villagers themselves are not so unkindly disposed toward him, or the squire either, though they are particularly careful not to place themselves in subjection to them. If there is anything the matter—sickness, accident, or any other misfortune—he is very useful, then; he is always willing to do,

give, or lend, to each and everyone alike. In bygone years the local doctor used to accept payment in kind from the farmers and villagers—corn from the first, and bacon from the others. This practice is common in some parts to-day, I am told.

Some of the names of people in the village are interesting, and form a suggestive catalogue. For instance, there is a Shakespeare, a Church, a Bell, a Parsons, a Clark, a Sexton, a Squire, a Cross, a Large, a Head, Legg, Little, Grubb, Stone, Wall, Sharp, Thorne, a King and Peapell, a Taylor, a Turtle, a Pike, Brooks, Bridges, Balls, Bowles, a Tubb, a Garret, a Lee, an Alder, and a Wildern.

There are a great many old sayings and rhymes, chiefly concerning the weather, used locally, which may be common enough in other quarters, but are none the less interesting. Speaking of a person who indulged in anything unnecessary, it is said: "He got no more use for't than a cat wi' a side-pocket." "If you goes a borrowin', you goes a sorrowin'." "As black as Old Harry's nutting-bag." "As black as Newgate knocker." "As easy as pet." "As slick as ninepence." "Put your love in the kettle, and love them all a little." "A wet Friday, a wet Sunday; and a wet Sunday, a wet week." "Sunshine Christmas Day, a good apple year." "Rain and hail brings frost at its tail." "February ull fill the ditch, black or white, no matter which." "Sunshine and shower, rain for half an hour." "Mackerel sky, not much wet and not much dry." "If a cock crows gwain to bed, he'll get up wi' a wet head." "Rain afore seven, dry afore eleven." "Just

enough blue in the sky to make a man a pair of trousers"; and so on. This latter saying might have had its origin over the Channel, since the Dutch wear blue trousers.

Other sayings common in our time are as old as humanity itself almost. Such are, "Like father, like son," and "Every man to his fancy, as the man said when he kissed the cow," which you may find in Cicero's letters to Atticus. Theocritus mentions a saying which corresponds very well with our "Charity begins at home." The Greek is, "The shin is farther off than the knee." "The Fisherman's Dream," by the same poet, is a naïve and delightful story of an angle from the rock, and contains a perfect description of the taking of a fish by rod and line in those days: the sly bait, a bite, hooking the fish, the bending rod, fear for the tackle, letting it run, and the ultimate landing of the prey. What language was ever like that of Theocritus? It is intoxicating.

A great many of the younger farmers of to-day live a hand-to-mouth existence, and are very negligent and untidy in respect of their yards, roads, and fences. Very often, where you might have seen a dozen ricks or more of hay and corn, you will not see one now. The corn is threshed out as soon as it is fit, and hurried away, and the hay is cleared to the last cut each season. The old farmers used always to keep the biggest rick in hand in case of a dry summer, but that is not the practice now. When a farmer not far from here, who was accredited with keeping his beast short of food, was ploughing

one day, his horse fell upon him from exhaustion, and caused a bad compound fracture of the leg. Old beans are of greater value than new, as being then more easy of digestion.

When a farm fire occurs, all the villagers turn out to assist in mastering the flames, and to lend a hand at the pumps. There was a great fire in the village when I was a boy, involving the loss of twenty-two ricks of hay, corn, and mustard, an engine and thresher, a steam grist mill, and a whole pile of buildings. The most amazing thing to me, at the time, was that no one seemed to make very great efforts to put it out; it was more like a festival than anything else. The farmer himself walked about smoking a cigar; others were engaged serving out bread, cheese, and beer to the men: there was no sign of sorrow or regret visible. We farm boys stayed up all night enjoying the fun, and crept sleepy to work late next morning, and were well scolded by the cowman; we ought to have been there milking long before. The poultry pen was consumed with its occupants; more than one helped himself to roast fowl and turkey.

A great many of the meadows you see divided into "lands" were ploughed fields once, but it is erroneous to think that they were all so, and many were never so at all; the furrows merely indicate the existence of drain-pipes. Of those which were ploughed fields, few date back farther than forty years or so. At the period of the Crimean War vast tracts of land were turned up to grow wheat, which was at famine price at that time. One farmer

alone in this locality broke up four hundred acres. After the termination of that war, and the increased imports from oversea, prices fell considerably, and the land was laid down for pasture again. A few farmers use oxen for ploughing hereabout, especially on the downs. These are brought to the toil young, and worked for five years, after which they are fatted for the markets.

There are very few living now who can call to mind the old agricultural riots, though Robert Brooks, who is eighty-six, can just remember them. He says the rioters used to march in a gang, blowing horns as they neared the village, and calling on the farm men to help them break up the machinery. The gangs were composed of the roughest of the farm labourers, who came strangers to the place, and demanded the surrender of the new-fashioned implements. Farmer Brooks, of Stanford-in-the-Vale, smashed his up himself, to prevent their falling into the rioters' hands; and when they came to Bury Town, the farmer there had all his machinery hauled out in a field, and shouted out, "Ther 'em be, look! Smash 'em up, mi bwoys!" but the rioters, with a touch of good-nature, passed by his and left them intact. Such of the rioters as were apprehended were transported to the Cape of Good Hope, or Van Dieman's Land, or Gibraltar. Many innocent persons suffered. One old fellow of Highworth declared he was in bed at the time, but the authorities suspected him, and he had to go. Looking back at this date we acknowledge the mistake of the revolution, but it was not so clear to the labourers of that generation

who were faced with the loss of their immediate work and livelihood.

And now it will be proper to speak of present times and present conditions, and the future of the farming class, and especially of the village labourers. The world is full of battle. All manners of trades are fighting for improved conditions of work and pay—better wages, shorter hours, a fuller recognition, a larger share in the conduct of things generally, a greater freedom altogether, collectively and individually—and what is more, they are highly successful in it; they are reaping enormous benefits. Can we say the same of our agricultural labourers? Are they in a position corresponding with the advances made in other working communities? There is only one answer to that question—they are not. In spite of all that is said concerning their welfare, they have not improved very much. I do not say they are no better off, but only a little. It is often said that is the farm labourer's own fault. I dispute that absolutely. It is not his fault at all. What should he do, then? I have heard that he should organize. That is easy enough in towns and manufacturing areas, and where you are employed by a company, but it is far different in rural places. Moreover, there is the question of means. Another thing, village labourers are averse from combinations of this kind; it is not their characteristic at all. What is more, agriculture could not proceed in such a fevered atmosphere as work is carried on in in the towns. Here you have not senseless lumps of iron and steel and mineral to deal with, engines and machinery, but flesh and

blood, life, that must be cared for at all cost. So the agricultural labourer is not free to act in the matter, which he intuitively knows and feels; that is the reason of his patience and silence. If his situation and condition are not his fault, then, whose is it? In my opinion it is the fault of us all—of we mechanics, the farmers themselves, the general community, and the Government. But I have been affirming that the agricultural labourer is happier than his town confrère; and so he is, without doubt, and healthier too, but he ought to be better off than he is. The very fact of his patience and endurance should obtain him sympathy, but we all know that it does not. Until the labourer rises and resorts to drastic measures he is never recognized at all. That is the hypocrisy of the whole situation in the labour world. Nothing is conceded spontaneously, nothing is done voluntarily. How much bitterness might be avoided if, instead of having to wring concessions from this or that one, they were anticipated, and yielded gracefully! That would be something like a politic arrangement of differences. But human nature says otherwise; and so dispute after dispute arises, and seldom or never reaches an amicable settlement.

Then there is the matter of the depopulation of rural places. There are several causes of the desertion of the country-side, not all of them intimately connected with the strictly labour or wage condition. In the first place, many young men, fired with the spirit of patriotism, enter, some the Army, some the Navy, others the Police force. These, after serving abroad or in our great towns and cities, and often

attaining to some degree of culture or other development, cannot reconcile themselves to the agricultural life, and so obtain other situations away from the soil. A great percentage of the girls of the village go to the towns as well, in service, and marry there, and so do not return any more. Many of the alert and enterprising, again, allured with the promise of more money and leisure, make tracks for the manufactories. Others, too, who have saved a few pounds, may emigrate. All this is bound to take place, and is perfectly logical, reasonable, and natural. Patriotism demands it; domestic life and duty demands it; manufacture demands it; our oversea dominions and industries demand it: it is their legitimate due; there is no fault at all to find with it. Besides this, there are those who are drawn away from sheer disgust with the toil itself and the "dulness" of village life. They want excitement and variety; never mind the cost, but they must have it. They must "see life," come into contact with people, and exercise the social faculty of the race; there are many who are unspeakably wretched if they cannot be in touch with a company. This is another cause of depopulation. But the great cause of all, the chief cause, is the insufficiency of remuneration and of leisure; the hours are too long and the money too small.

Many people are of the opinion that education would cure the evil. It is thought that by educating the people they will come to improve their condition that way. All I can say is, that if the needs of agricultural labourers receive no attention until they are educated, they will have to wait a precious long

time for it. The better method, in my view, would be to improve their material position first, then, if they wanted to be educated, let them persevere with it; at any rate, give them an opportunity first. But agricultural communities do not *want* education, however much they may *need* it. Neither do the towns want it, though they need it worse than ever, to counterbalance the artificiality of the life and environment. There are reading-rooms and other facilities in almost every village nowadays, but no one attends them; the youths love sports and idleness in leisure, and the older ones love the fireside, rest, or the garden plot and allotment. And though you have libraries and institutions in the towns, they are not utilized by anything like a satisfactory proportion of the people. Vast sums are spent upon buildings and salaries, but desperate efforts have to be made to secure the attendance of students; you have to beg and pray them to come. This I am sure of; and in the end it is for the most part a theoretical, a paper advancement that is made; the actual results are small. But I leave this to others and return to the village. The farmer wants a man to work the land and attend to the cattle. He himself has no use for books. This he tells you. I have been told so many times, and am forced to acknowledge that, after all, the farmer is the better judge of his own circumstances and requirements. Farmers of high intelligence tell you this, the very best of husbandmen; and you must respect their opinion. As a rule, the introduction to books is the beginning of the desire to leave the land. Moreover, you cannot

force people to be educated. For my part, I should glory to see them so, or at any rate with a fair share of knowledge. It makes men wiser, and ennobles life. But the wish is vain; and perhaps we might not all be the happier for it. But the educated workman is not wanted in the town or country either; he is too interrogative and superior. The farmer would not employ him for one thing, and he would not work for the farmer in the other case. Only the other day a neighbour of mine advertised for a cowman, and received an application from a man with just the qualifications, apparently, but he lived in the town, *in a terrace*. That spoiled his chance. "Wha's a livin' ther for?" the farmer said. "He got no business to be in a terrace if he's a cowman." His chance was prejudiced. Could you blame the farmer? Be not deceived with the educational hope; it is not the theoretical gift the country requires, but the practical. It is not education so much that is needed—though that *is* needed, and badly—but sympathetic consideration and generous treatment. Actions speak louder than words; that is what the village labourer wants.

Better housing of the agricultural working class is another ideal, and a highly laudable one, too, yet even that is far from being the actual solution of the difficulty. I suppose that a better house means a bigger house; but if you build ever such a fine pile for the rustic, and do not add to his wages, you will have done him but a slight benefit, on the one hand, and will have increased his responsibility and necessity on the other; for a bigger cottage requires more furniture and equipment, more care, trouble, time, and outlay,

too. But he must be housed, all the same. Where you build, let the cottages be good rather than big; not extravagant nor niggardly, but sufficient. Let them contain one large room downstairs and an equivalent sleeping space, with abundant lights and ventilation, and let them be well made. There is too much jerry-building nowadays; that is out of place with rustic surroundings. Moreover, it is like the shoddy suit, short-lived and expensive.

Do you know that boys and youths of sixteen and seventeen in the factories draw as much, and very often more, in wages for the little they do than the carter, cowman, and shepherd, with lifelong experience, good staid men, with wives and families to keep, too? Every day I see it, and am indignant at the thought of it; not that the youths obtain so much, but that the carter, and cowman, and shepherd derive so little. There is a ridiculous disparity between the wages of the town and those of the country, and there is only one conclusion to be drawn from it: that agricultural labour is improperly and insufficiently paid for. Could you explain why it is that Wiltshire and Dorsetshire and Oxfordshire, counties so rich and fertile in pasture and corn land, should pay the lowest wages of all in the country? Yet such is the case, for the former of these only pays an average of 15s. 8d.; Dorset, 15s. 6d.; and Oxford, the very lowest of all, 14s. 6d.; while Middlesex pays 20s. 4d.; Northumberland, 21s. 7d.; and Durham, 22s. 2d.; although the labour is the same, and the farms are richer in the south and the yield greater. The fact of the matter is,

the farm-labourer is paid, not according to his merits, nor the share of work he performs, nor his strength, nor his skill, nor his character, nor the capacity of his employer, but merely according to local custom. The fear of breaking a custom holds him down, and cheats him of the legitimate fruits of his labour, which is a great injustice, and one that ought speedily to be put an end to.

There are other aspects of agricultural conditions such as would vitally affect the life of the villagers: these are the movement towards breaking up the large farms, and the division of estates and properties, and so on; but that is rather a matter for the future to settle, and not the present time. As to "land hunger," and the familiar cry of "back to the land," there is a great deal of rubbish attaching to the manner in which these utterances are made by the average individual; they are often nothing more than mere political clap-trap and humbug. The townspeople are especially urgent in their desire to see *you* go back to the land, but have no intention whatever of making the experiment themselves; they only want a monopoly of their industries and privileges. "If it wasn't for you cow-bangers and muck-heavers," they say, "we should be getting more here than we do." Meanwhile, every ruse is employed by traders and amusement-mongers to induce the rustic to bring his little wages to the town and spend it there. The tendency of manufacturers is to compel their workpeople to reside under the shadow of their walls, thereby creating the very condition antagonistic to their interests. The

whole position would be highly comical if it were not so vital and serious.

That which would undoubtedly popularize life on the land would be, from the point of view of the tenant, a system of small holdings tending to ownership, and, in the case of the labourers, shorter hours of work and better wages. Let the farmer learn method, and dispense with dilly-dallying; he often keeps his men about an unnecessarily long time. The order of the day is to be prompt; crowd time if you will, but never prolong it. Let the farmer see to this. Let him take a lesson from the changes operating in other industries, and so safeguard himself and his interests. Let him learn generosity and humanity in an even greater degree. The husbandman who grinds his labourers down and cuts their winter wages, and afterwards feasts his friends in the New Year, is a danger to society and a despot, yet is not unfrequently met with. If, on the other hand, agriculture cannot do something to help the lot of its poor and lighten their hardships, it is time the Government gave it their closer consideration, with some form of preferential treatment for genuine farm-labourers, a special old age provision, bounties for terms of consecutive service, or a remission of their contribution to the State scheme of insurance. At any rate, something should be done to protect and encourage the farm workman; it is not right that he alone should be forgotten and neglected. Jemmy Boulton and Dudley Sansum were happy in their day, though they were low-paid; but times have

changed considerably since then, and every succeeding generation brings fresh conditions and new hardships with it. It would be the greatest joy of all to me to see the country-side happy and satisfied, everlastingly flourishing and prosperous; you might laugh at all other external symptoms and differences then.

THE END

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